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gamesTM

PS2 | GameCube | Xbox | PC | GBA | Arcade | Retro



FULL REVIEWS

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
[XB]
RESIDENT EVIL: DEAD AIM
[PS2]
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II
[XB]
SPLINTER CELL
[GC/GBA]
GOLDEN SUN: THE LOST AGE
[GBA]
SPEED KINGS
[PS2]
RED FACTION II
[XB/GC]
RISE OF NATIONS
[PC]
SONIC ADVENTURE DX
[GC]

REPORT
E3 2003
Xbox dominates videogames show

RETRO
2600 VCS
Atari's classic returns from the desert

REVIEW
F-ZERO AX
SEGA's racer screams into the arcades

PREVIEWED
HALO 2
"It's Halo on fire, going 130mph…"
Jason Jones, Bungie Studios

180 PAGES OF GAMING EXPOSED


eMag

Anyone who has ever attended E3 will know that the arduous journey is more than worth it. Long-haul flights, sore necks and aeroplane food pale into insignificance when compared to the tantalising glimpse of the finest videogames offered at the world's largest games expo.

Unfortunately, I had the less than joyous task of trekking from one colossal hall to the next every half hour to meet with the all-important PR representatives of as many key publishers and developers that the three days allowed, but rest assured, **games**™ was there in force to sample the delights of as many games as possible.

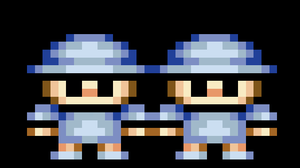
Contained within these pages is a fair indication of the very best that gaming will offer over the course of the next year. The timing couldn't be better, as publishers downshift for the summer months with nary a quality game in sight – something that's illustrated by the generally disappointing games on offer in this month's reviews section. We recommend that you take heed of the review scores and be thankful that there's certainly much better to come.

Simon Phillips, Group Editor



PLAYER-1

850



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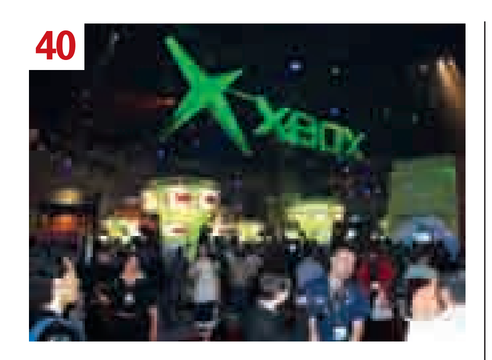
IS PLAYER-2

350

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The *Mario Kart* series returns but is it back on form? Find out on page 54.

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RETRO GAMING

Blowing the dust off more gaming gems from the past

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HALO 2
Bigger and better than ever – Master Chief returns to conquer E3

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

The latest games and peripherals were all on show.

Halo 2 and *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* drew crowds.

ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER CHANCE FOR THE INDUSTRY TO PEDDLE ITS WARES, AND ANOTHER CHANCE TO GET THE FIRST LOOK AT THE NEXT BIG THING…

SHOWCASE SHOWDOWN



Once again the Electronic Entertainment Expo has finished as quickly as it arrived. With Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony all out in force there were bound to be some huge announcements, and despite many no-shows this year's event didn't fail to impress.

Microsoft arguably made the greatest impact out of the three main players, with its focus on giving gamers what it calls the 'digital entertainment lifestyle'. "People living the digital entertainment lifestyle want to be connected," said Robbie Bach, senior vice president of Microsoft's games division. "No-one is more devoted to a digital lifestyle than videogame players, so how will we connect gamers with the lifestyle they love and the entertainment they want? Our answer is Xbox."

Surprisingly, Microsoft also had the strongest games line-up with the likes of *Halo 2*, *Doom III* and *Counter-Strike* impressing all that saw them. Rare was also out in force and, despite no *Perfect Dark Zero* or *Sabreman Stampede*, we were still treated to *Kameo: Elements of Power*, *Conker: Live And Uncut* and *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*. *Kameo*'s shaping up nicely, but Rare's other two efforts look particularly uninspiring and showed little of the style or finesse of its early N64 games.

Nintendo's focus this year was the much-vaunted (but very under-used) connectivity between its two consoles (see 'How Was It For You?'). With the likes of *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, *F-Zero AX*, *Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour* and *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*, Nintendo was keen to demonstrate that it was still a major player in the hardware market.

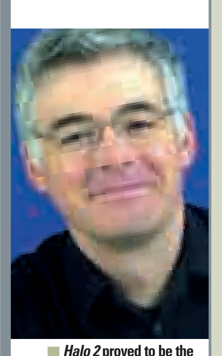
"Thanks to tremendous contributions from third-party partners, we're delivering more entertainment and diversity to Nintendo fans than any time since we launched our first home console 20 years ago," explained Nintendo's president, Satoru Iwata.

Like Microsoft, Sony was also keen to push its own online service with an all-new PlayStation2 online pack to replace the existing hardware by this summer. Sony's EyeToy was demonstrated to good effect, along with confirmation that the company is finally entering into the handheld market with the PlayStation Portable (see page 10). "With the battle for console supremacy decided, we are departing from the status quo in an effort to broaden the in-home entertainment market," Kaz Hirai, president of Sony Computer Entertainment America, confidently stated.

While we may have been slightly disappointed that neither the PS3 or the hotly rumoured Xbox 1.5 were shown or even announced, there was more than enough on display to satisfy even the most ardent gamers.


Connectivity was Nintendo's selling point.


Sony's online hopes are pinned on *Gran Turismo 4*.


Halo 2 proved to be the Xbox's strongest asset.

HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?

Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo look back at this year's E3

NINTENDO



SHELLY FRIEND, HEAD OF PR, NINTENDO EUROPE

"We had a great E3 this year showcasing the range of games we have coming up for GameCube and Game Boy Advance in 2003 and beyond. *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* went down a storm, as did *Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike* and *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*. One of the most important features was connectivity and Nintendo showed some truly unique games; *Pac-Man* and *The Four Swords* demonstrated just how much fun you could have playing together with your GameCube and GBA. My favourite game was definitely *Pikmin 2*; I loved the original and I'm really pleased that I won't be up against the clock this time round. I also like the fact that you can now control two characters and different types of Pikmin."

SONY

JENNIE KONG, SONY PR

"I think the most important feature was demonstrating the exclusive range and depth of new and exciting gameplay opportunities still to come on the PS2. There was a superb line-up of titles spearheaded by *GT4*, and the EyeToy was also very well received, demonstrating innovative, fun gameplay and accessibility into the gaming community for new mainstream audiences of all ages. Our online offering also had a strong presence with the announcement of SCE's exclusive deal with EA and, of course, the announcement of the PlayStation Portable console was one of the most talked about items at the show. I didn't have much time outside of our stand as I was treated to some *GT4* link-up action (which looks set to be the sexiest racing simulator), but other than that I'd say the *MGS3* trailer looked phenomenal and the rest of the third-party offerings were great too."

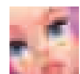
MICROSOFT

RICHARD TEVERSHAM, UK XBOX MARKETING MANAGER

"E3 was a great show for Xbox this year; it really demonstrated the strength and innovation that Xbox delivers. We have an incredible number of titles rolling out and are also expanding our online gaming service to deliver an unbeatable social gaming experience. Xbox is in a very strong position and I believe that E3 cemented this for us. *Halo 2* was hugely important to us, and the spontaneous gasps and cheers in our press briefing were proof that Bungie really is innovating and leaving the competition behind. *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, *Conkers* and *Kameo* are very 'Rare' and have a broader appeal than other games in our portfolio, so we're pleased to give people a chance to play them. For me, the best aspect about the show was all the positivity towards Xbox."

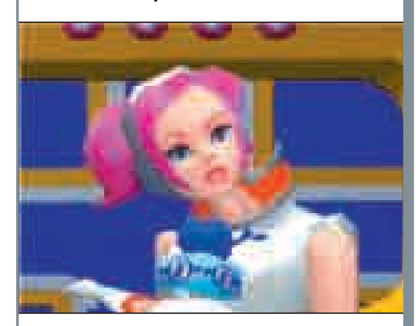
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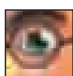
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



UP, DOWN, UP, DOWN, SUE, SUE, SUE…

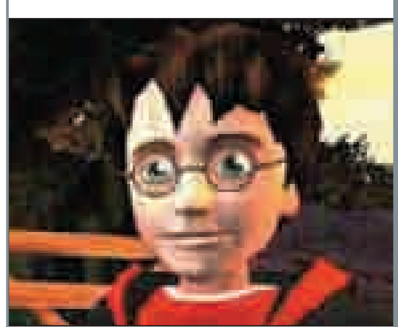
Kierin Kirby, aka Deee-lite's Lady Miss Kier, is filing a lawsuit against SEGA for allegedly basing *Space Channel 5*'s main character, Ulala, on her without permission. The singer's lawsuit claims that "The similarities and likenesses are so close that viewers, listeners and consumers were and are confused or likely to become confused between Ulala and the plaintiff." America being the land of the fee, Kirby is now seeking over $750,000 in compensation.





ANYONE FOR QUIDDITCH?

Thought you were safe from *Harry Potter* games until the next film release? Think again. In what sounds like a worrying new franchise EA is releasing *Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup*. Fans of the boy wizard will be able to battle against rival teams from all over the world and use a unique ladder system where players must defeat the team ranked above them by a variable number of points. Although it's nice to see a licence that isn't a platformer we wonder where this could lead…



STOP PRESS SONY'S NEW CONSOLE?

Just as we were going to press, Sony announced a new piece of hardware called the PSX. Not to be confused with the original PlayStation, the PSX (the name is not confirmed yet) is a new device that will feature a TV tuner, DVD recorder and a hard disc drive as well as being able to play those all-important PS2 discs.

It seems that the PSX will be similar to the TiVo and Sky Plus systems and will also allow the downloading of music and possibly movies via a high-speed Internet port (although this is likely to only be available in Japan).

We're definitely looking forward to hearing more about the PSX, especially as it seems to be essentially the same idea as Microsoft's HomeStation. More news as we get it…





SONY PLAYS A NEW HAND

SONY STEALS E3 WITH ITS PLAYSTATION HANDHELD

Although the hotly rumoured PlayStation3 failed to materialise at this year's E3, Sony still managed to steal the show with the announcement of its new handheld console. The PlayStation Portable (PSP) might not be due until the end of 2004, but that hasn't stopped us from getting very excited about it.

Despite a lack of screenshots or images of the machine itself, the specifications appear to be particularly impressive and could give the Game Boy Advance and Nokia N-Gage a run for their money. Games will come on universal media discs (UMD), which are 1.8GB, 60mm optical discs that can hold four times as much data as original PSone CDs.

The PSP will feature 3D rendering courtesy of NURBS (Non-Uniform Rational B-Spline) and will also include conventional polygons. Video playback will be enhanced by MPEG4 and allegedly allows for around two hours of DVD picture quality displayed on the PSP's 4.5inch, 480 x 272 pixel (16:9) screen.

Another important aspect will be a USB 2.0 port to enable it to link to the PlayStation2, other PSP handhelds and Sony devices such as Memory Sticks. What's more, plugging in Memory Sticks will apparently enable 'network applications and data transportability in a wireless environment' according to Sony (although it hasn't elaborated any further on this yet).

"WE AIM TO BECOME A NEW DRIVING FORCE IN THE PORTABLE ENTERTAINMENT PLATFORM ARENA,"

KEN KURATAGI, SONY

* Artist impression

PC-based development tools for the new console will be in place by the end of this year, as well as a new licence scheme for PSP software development.

Ken Kuratagi, president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment, was confident that the machine would be a success. "Just as PlayStation and PlayStation2 revolutionised in-home computer entertainment, we aim to become a new driving force in the portable entertainment platform arena," he said.

With such a bold statement from Sony's president it was interesting to hear the response. Satoru Iwata, president of Nintendo, didn't seem worried by the new machine: "The fact that they are putting a lot of features into it [PSP] is very Sony-like, but at the moment we dominate the handheld market and there is no need for us to be overly concerned right now," he said. "Make no mistake – this time, we will not give our competitors a head start and we will continue to do what we do best."

Strong words, and let's not forget that the Game Boy has seen off plenty of technically superior consoles in the past. However, with the huge success of the PlayStation brand behind it, the launch of the PSP could see the start of a new console war that Nintendo can't afford to lose. We're sure that Nintendo is secretly pleased with Sony's early announcement, as it gives the company plenty of time to act before the PSP is launched at the end of 2004. It's still early days, however, and we must be careful not fall for hype – stats aren't everything…

A CONSOLE IN THE HAND…

If and when the PSP appears, it needs to remember that power isn't everything in the handheld market. Just take a look at some of the pretenders to the portable gaming throne…

Atari Lynx
It was technically superior to the Game Boy, but its size, legendary reputation for guzzling batteries and meagre supply of games meant it wasn't to be.

Game Gear
SEGA's first foray into the handheld market failed. Despite great conversions of Master System titles it fared no better than Atari's Lynx.

Nomad
Despite being powerful (it was basically a handheld Mega Drive), a limited battery life meant the Nomad couldn't topple the Game Boy Color.

Neo Geo Pocket Colour
Even with great conversions of *Metal Slug* and *Samurai Shodown*, a limited amount of third-party games meant people weren't interested.



YOU BROKE MY PS2

POTENTIAL TROUBLE FOR SONY AS PS2 OWNERS FILE COURT CASE

Angry Americans have filed a lawsuit against Sony, alleging that the company has deceived thousands of consumers by marketing the PlayStation2 as a DVD player in addition to a videogame console.

It seems that many American PS2 owners regularly receive a 'disc read error' whenever they try to play a DVD and disgruntled gamers have now voiced their anger via a consumer report on News Channel 10.

A similar story is now being repeated here in the UK, with a recent edition of BBC's *Watchdog* running the same feature. Disappointed buyers are saying that even after receiving refurbished machines from Sony, they are still experiencing similar problems with the replacement console. Sony was quick to respond, issuing the following statement:

"We categorically deny the assertion that there is an 'inherent design fault' in PlayStation2," said David Wilson, Sony PR. "We were concerned about the suggestion that a filing in a US court involving two plaintiffs demonstrates 'public dissatisfaction' in a market where over 22 million units have been sold, and whilst we sympathise with anyone who has a machine that develops a fault outside of its warranty period we feel that our customer service provision for such incidents is as good as, if not better than, most services provided for other consumer electronic goods."

If you have any problems with your PlayStation2 you can contact the Sony Entertainment Europe Helpline on 0870 599 8877.

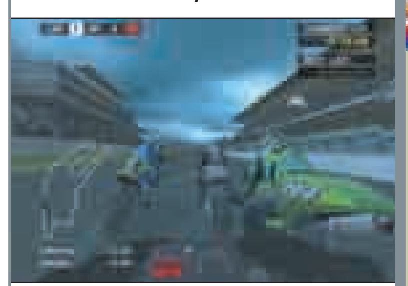
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



FUN IN THE SUN

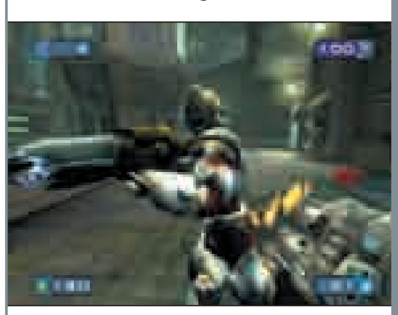
UK-based developer Climax has announced the creation of its first US studio, which will be situated in sunny Venice, California. With four studios in the UK, it is hoped that the addition of an American studio will allow Climax to establish itself overseas. "Opening a US office was a necessary step to continuing our growth and pushing the limits of the company both creatively and from a business perspective," explained Climax CEO, Karl Jeffery. With hits like *Moto GP 1* and *2* under its belt and the recent acquisition of several key Crawfish staff we're sure Climax will do very well for itself.





NAME CHANGE

After nearly 20 years in the business, Infogrames Entertainment SA (IESA) has decided to adopt the Atari moniker instead. "In any language, Atari is synonymous with videogames and it's recognised for transforming entertainment," said Bruno Bonnell, chairman and CEO of IESA and Atari. "Our industry is now outpacing Hollywood and by choosing Atari as our signature, we are demonstrating our determination to take entertainment to the next level for gamers worldwide." Let's just hope it doesn't release another *ET* game…





Now that SEGA is in the money it's suddenly less keen to merge with anyone.

MERGERS CALLED OFF AS SEGA ANNOUNCES FIRST PROFIT IN FIVE YEARS

THE HEDGEHOG FIGHTS BACK?

After months of speculation and merger talks, SEGA has stated that it's back in a financially strong position and has no intention of entering into any partnerships. This is a surprising turnaround for the firm, since SEGA has been strongly linked with Sammy and, recently, Namco.

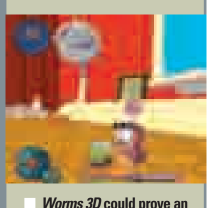
Only weeks before the announcement, it seemed that Namco was pretty confident about the merger, with one Namco official saying: "We have to do something or SEGA will go under; Namco is SEGA's best partner because we are in the same industry." Of course, with SEGA and Namco appearing to all but sign on the dotted line, Sammy was less than happy with the new state of affairs. "SEGA has betrayed and embarrassed us," fumed a senior executive, "but we don't really care any more."

This is the first time in five years that SEGA has actually managed to make a profit. Last year it had a loss of ¥17.8 billion (around £93 million), but an impressive turnaround has seen profits soar to ¥3.05 billion (roughly £16 million). SEGA released 106 games last year and sold 10.66 million units, this year, it plans to release 77 titles and sell 9.25 million units. It claims that 50 per cent of last year's titles made an overall loss and it now plans to cut this down to only 20 per cent.

However, the recent merger debacle has caused both Hideki Sato and Tetsu Kamaya (SEGA's president and COO respectively) to step down. In their place, Hisao Oguchi (SEGA's new president and former president of SEGA studio Hitmaker) has announced a number of key initiatives, the most surprising being the eventual consolidation of SEGA's development studios. The ten major studios, including SEGA-AM2, Amusement Vision and Sonic Team, will be condensed into four or five core operations, which could result in a loss of between 10 to 20 per cent of SEGA's thousand-strong development team.

On the plus side though, the acquisition of third-party developed titles is an avenue Oguchi-san is keen to pursue. SEGA Europe has already announced publishing deals with Games Workshop's *Warhammer Online* and Team 17's *Worms 3D*. Sadly, against these acquisitions (and perhaps most importantly for gamers), many key franchises like *Crazy Taxi* will be laid to rest.

As much as we like SEGA, we think this could be a case of 'running before you can walk'. Does it really know what it's doing?



Worms 3D could prove an important title for SEGA.



Is this upturn the start of something good for SEGA, or is it just a blip?

RUNNING LIKE PATCHWORK

PC GAMERS TO RECEIVE UPDATES VIA NEW DATABASE

Aardwork Software used this year's E3 to unveil its GameShadow database; a system giving PC gamers the luxury of receiving proactive data and online access to the latest PC patches from one handy source. GameShadow's database will be updated several times a day, so gamers will always be able to receive the latest news and patches as soon as they're available.

With so many people now playing games (the Interactive Digital Software Association estimates around 145 million Americans alone), software publishers are finding it increasingly difficult to promote and make gamers aware of every new patch that's available. By teaming up with game publishers, gaming websites and developers, Aardwork is aiming to provide much-needed market intelligence along with a strong delivery infrastructure.

"Delivery of patches and software updates to PC games has been a costly and time-consuming process for gamers and publishers alike for many years," said Tony Treadwell, CEO of Aardwork Software Limited. "As the cost of distribution and maintaining the top PC games titles spirals upward, GameShadow can help publishers reduce overheads and improve game lifespan through provision of a single interface to the gaming community for PC games patch delivery."

Considering how many PC games need patching these days, ShadowGate is definitely a good idea. However, although it sounds great news for those with Internet access, we doubt the same can be said for the modemless gamers who'll miss out.



Get all the latest patches from one place. Nifty, eh?





The Sims 2 will be the official Sim sequel, as opposed to the numerous expansion packs and add-ons like *The Sims On Holiday, The Sims House Party* and *The Sims Nip Down The Shops For A Pint Of Milk And A Bag Of Frazzles.*

GET AN (ARTIFICIAL) LIFE AGAIN

THE SIMS FINALLY GETS A PROPER SEQUEL (AND NOT AN EXPANSION DISC IN SIGHT)

After a three-year wait and countless expansion packs, gamers will finally be able to enjoy a true sequel to one of the most popular PC games ever made. Cunningly titled *The Sims 2*, the game is currently under development at Electronic Arts' Maxis studio and will now enable you to control your Sims over an entire lifetime. Genetics will play a very large part in the sequel, as the DNA of Sims can be passed down through generations, allowing an all-new in-depth experience.

"The Sims themselves have always been the most interesting part of the game experience for me," said Will Wright, chief game designer at Maxis Studio. "Giving them DNA makes them even more lifelike and increases the personal connection between players and their Sims. Playing Sims across a lifetime and experiencing their emergent traits will give players a deeper, more realistic experience."

Thanks to an entirely new graphics engine, Maxis is making *The Sims 2* more lifelike and dynamic, as well as introducing a new 'Create-A-Sim' feature that enables players to create the perfect digital beings. Other additions will include the ability to build houses over two storeys high and customise homes in even greater detail, thanks to all new furniture, lighting and objects. Of course, this can all only be good news – although we were far from impressed with the recent console versions, the PC version of *The Sims* is still a firm favourite. No release date has yet been confirmed, but we guarantee this will sell and sell and sell and…

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



BORED OF THE RINGS?

If you thought the *Lord Of The Rings* would end with the *Return Of The King*, you're very much mistaken, as Turbine Entertainment has started development on a new PC MMORPG entitled *Middle Earth Online* for Vivendi. "We are extremely excited to be working with a world-class developer like Turbine," enthused Jim Wilson, executive vice president of product development at Vivendi Universal Games. "Together, our goal will be to bring the vision and spirit of the literary works of J.R.R. Tolkien to life." Let the Hobbit-slaying begin.





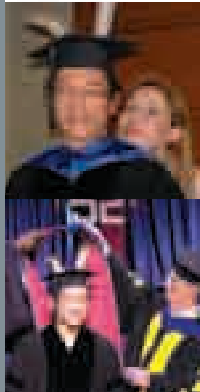
GREAT DEAL FOR LIVE

When Xbox Live was first announced, many were wary of how much Microsoft would charge for renewal subscriptions. Fortunately, there's no need to worry, as the new rates are very reasonable and offer a variety of choices. A full year's renewal can be bought for $49.99 (about £30) or gamers can pay $5.99 (£3.50) a month. People new to the service can expect to pay a slightly higher charge of $70 (£43). It's great to see Microsoft giving gamers a choice and hopefully we'll see a similar situation in the UK next year.





This controversial book will tell Xbox owners how to install new chips and upgrade their machines. Bill Gates isn't going to be pleased…



Andrew 'Bunnie' Huang's college research paper was based on his Xbox hacking activities.

XBOX HACKER RELEASES CONTROVERSIAL BOOK ALONE AFTER PUBLISHER BACKS OUT

HACKS THE WAY TO DO IT

Talk about fighting the establishment. Hacker and engineer Andrew 'Bunnie' Huang is having so many problems publishing his controversial book *Hacking the Xbox: An Introduction to Reverse Engineering* that he's had to fund publication himself.

Huang's book apparently pre-sold between 500-600 copies and is a 'warts and all' guide to getting the most out of the Xbox's hardware. Dubious chapters include 'Installing a Blue LED' and 'Soldering Techniques', as well as describing the Xbox's mod chips and how they work. The book also reveals how the 'Matrix' chip can be installed without solder over a test port that manufacturers decided to leave on the Xbox motherboard. "You don't leave these test structures on the motherboard if you want it secure," says Huang.

The most interesting part, however, is where Huang discusses the technique that cemented his reputation as a hardware hacker. Huang first invented an anti-encryption hack as part of a research paper, although he had told Microsoft about his activities and was actually able to negotiate a deal that enabled him to complete the paper without the threat of legal action. He's had no such luck with *Hacking the Xbox* though, because not only does it go beyond simply discussing a lone hacking technique, but it also allegedly teaches readers to actually think like a hacker as well.

With Microsoft constantly fighting software and hardware pirates around the world, it's little wonder that Huang is finding it rather hard to get his book on the shelves. "It's about getting the book out there on principle, because I can't find a publisher willing to publish it," explains Huang over his decision to publish the book himself. "I think it's controversial, but not illegal."

It's yet to be revealed if Microsoft will take any action against *Hacking the Xbox*. However, with anti-piracy measures being stepped up by the major console manufacturers, Huang is unlikely to have an easy time bringing his book to the public.

Microsoft is already getting tough on piracy, so it's not going to like this…

GOT A SPARE $800 MILLION?

VIVENDI PLANS TO SELL ITS GAMES DIVISION

After months of speculation, Jean-Rene Fourtou, Vivendi's chief executive, has finally confirmed that Vivendi is planning to sell its game unit. It's not the first time a sale has been mentioned and last year it was speculated that Vivendi was asking as much as $2 billion (roughly £1.21 billion), with Electronic Arts and Microsoft as likely buyers.

However, sources are now saying that Microsoft and Electronic Arts are out of the running and that any future sale will more likely be around the price of $800 million (about £487 million), which is a similar amount to Vivendi Universal Games' annual revenue.

The sale is said to be part of Fourtou's plan to recoup the billions of dollars lost by Jean-Marie Messier, Vivendi's former CEO, in a move that nearly brought Vivendi to the brink of ruin. Unsurprisingly, Vivendi is keeping very quiet and would only offer a "no comment", although it's thought that any new deal will not include the many movie rights that have been bought over the last few years.

With Microsoft and EA out of the picture, who'll buy Vivendi?



All these can be yours for a meagre £487 million. A snip.



POKÉDON'T

NINTENDO CLAMPS DOWN ON IMPORTERS

With *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire* being two of the most anticipated titles for the Game Boy Advance, it was inevitable that they would get imported ahead of the European launch date. But Nintendo, worried that sales of the games would suffer when the titles are officially released here, has issued a warning to all importers selling *Ruby* and *Sapphire* (as well as other Nintendo games), already forcing one business to close.

On 13 May, Torquay-based TQ Games issued the following statement. "It has been brought to our attention by Nintendo of Europe and its solicitors that we are allegedly selling goods that should not be sold within the UK or Europe. We have been requested to stop selling any Nintendo products that are from Japan or the USA. While we do not agree with this action, we do not have the huge financial backing like Nintendo to take this any further."

We've been unable to get hold of Peter Brown of TQ Games and Nintendo has refused to comment. If the company is so bothered by import sales, it may be wise to either not make the GBA region-free, or release titles simultaneously.

Got *Pokémon* already? Shame on you (apparently).



GAMES ROOM 101

THINGS WE HATE ABOUT VIDEOGAMES

NO.7: THE WORD 'EXCLUSIVE' DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING

Ideally, a game that appears exclusively on a particular console should do one of two things: either it will be of such high quality that it'll become a classic, or it will have built up a level of hype that'll guarantee sales (regardless of what the actual game is like). Of course, the whole process of signing exclusives is designed specifically to increase the attraction of your product – just as it works with magazines (reviews, previews and covers), so it happens on consoles too. With the desired effect being to increase sales of your console off the back of an exclusive game, it's clearly in your interests to get the best stuff.

Sadly, it's also in the interests of publishers to make sackloads of cash; hence the numerous examples of games being launched exclusively for one machine, then ported to others several months later if they're successful. Cases in point – Ubi Soft's *Splinter Cell*, EA's *LOTR: The Two Towers*, Konami's *Metal Gear Solid 2* and even *GTA: Vice City* (which was, according to Rockstar's PR, never going to come out on the PC… until it did). Once again, it's like magazines – one might get a scoop preview but you can be pretty sure everyone else will have it a week later.



The PS2 and GameCube versions of *Splinter Cell* might have had more missions, but they didn't look nearly as nice as the Xbox game.

GTA: Vice City might be PS2-exclusive, but if *GTA4* doesn't go cross-platform we'll eat our hats.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



WHAT A BARGAIN

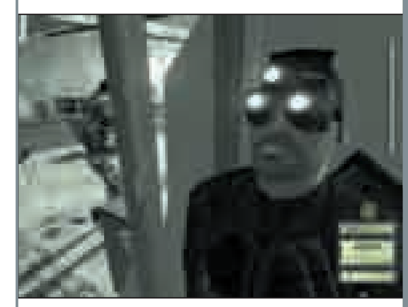
Dial-up Internet use is about to get cheaper, as One.Tel launches a range of packages from as little as £3.99 a month. "The way we use the Internet in the UK has completely changed in the last five years, but the way we pay for connection has not," said Mike Holliday-Williams, commercial director of One.Tel. The packages range from Night Owl for £3.99 per month (10pm to 8am, 7 days a week) to GameXtra at £14.99 per month (24/7 with six hours uninterrupted gaming or surfing). Now, let's see a similar system for broadband, please.

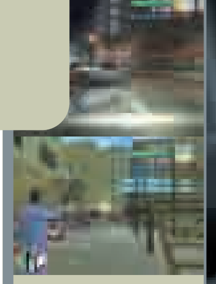




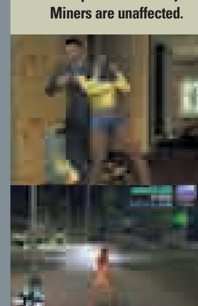
CELL OUT?

We knew it was going to happen and Ubi Soft has now confirmed that *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* will be appearing early next year. This time around, however, Ubi Soft has stated that the title will be a multiformat game from the outset. It's quite possible that this could now mean that Microsoft is not going to receive any sort of exclusivity deal. This could be a huge blow, as it was one of the Xbox's killer titles last Christmas. Even if Microsoft misses out, we're more than happy to get reacquainted with Sam Fisher again.





Minors won't be able to sample *The Getaway*. Miners are unaffected.





WASHINGTON STATE MAKES IT ILLEGAL TO SELL GAMES TO MINORS

THE DAY THE VIOLENCE DIED

In an unprecedented move, the American state of Washington is implementing a new law that will impose large fines on retail employees who sell violent videogames to minors (under-17s). The bill in question targets games that feature the killing of police officers and any violence against women (though not children, strangely enough) and will result in a fine of $500 for any retail employee ignoring it.

While some have rolled their eyes at this new law, we can't help but think this may be an effective deterrent. After all, we've all watched in disbelief as youngsters have picked up the likes of *Grand Theft Auto* from their local retailers, despite being clearly underage. Naturally, it seems that not everyone agrees with Washington's new plan. The Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) fully intends to block the new US law. "It's not only unnecessary and unconstitutional, but it clearly won't solve the issue at which it's apparently aimed," argued Doug Lowenstein, president of ISDA. "The answer is to focus on parental education and awareness of the ESRB ratings, not to try and turn retailers into parents."

With the new law only recently put into place, it will be interesting to see how it fares and, should the system work, if anything similar ever makes it to the UK.

TWO BECOME ONE

NINTENDO'S GAME BOY PLAYER LAUNCHES FREE WITH THE GAMECUBE

In a move that surprised a lot of people, Nintendo used E3 to announce that its Game Boy Advance Player (a device enabling you to play GBA games on your Cube) will be bundled with the GameCube for a limited period. This excellent offer will be available from June 20, has a retail price of around £140 and shows an unusual amount of aggression from the normally placid Nintendo. Or is it merely another desperate attempt to shift Cubes?

"This offer builds on the incredible momentum generated by our Game Boy Advance line, which has already sold 35 million systems worldwide," said Peter MacDougall, executive vice president of Nintendo of America. "Once we saw the enthusiastic reception at E3, it was an easy decision to move ahead with our plans to combine these two products."

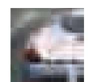
Although it's possible that the Game Boy's library of games is enough to convince gamers to shell out for a GameCube, we hope Nintendo isn't putting all its eggs in one basket.



Want to see mini *Metroid* on the big screen? Grab a Cube and a GBA Player in one go with this new bundle.



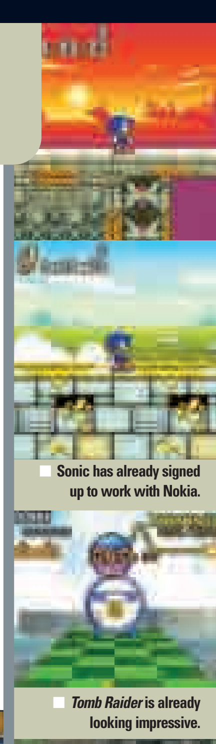
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



NEW BOSS FOR MIDWAY

After a fairly lacklustre year, Midway has appointed a new CEO. David Zucker will replace Neil Nicastro and it's hoped that the move will allow for more mature products from Midway. Zucker has previously been the COO for Playboy Enterprises and has had senior roles at the Disney-owned sports group ESPN. Despite the release of many retro titles like *Defender* and *SpyHunter*, Midway has failed to enjoy any great success over the past year, with even the much-hyped *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* failing to excite UK gamers.





Sonic has already signed up to work with Nokia.

Tomb Raider is already looking impressive.

It looks lovely – but then it probably should for $299…



UN N-GAGING

NOKIA'S ENTRY INTO THE HANDHELD WORLD FAILS TO IMPRESS AT E3



If the showing at E3 was anything to go by, things are not looking at all good for Nokia's new handheld; especially since the unveiling of the N-Gage, shortly after Sony's PlayStation Portable was revealed, failed to impress in a big way.

Refusing to go by the adage 'make your hardware cheap and get money back on software', Nokia has really gone out on a limb by stating that its N-Gage will retail for $299 (around £180), with games costing between $30-40 (£18-£24) each. Unsurprisingly, Nokia refuses to be drawn into any parallels with Nintendo and Sony and insists that the N-Gage is in a class of its own – a move that could prove costly for the company.

"The Nokia N-Gage is creating a unique entertainment platform for the games industry, together with major game publishers, developers, network operators and service providers," said Anssi Vanjoki, executive vice president of Nokia Mobile Phones. "For game developers, the prospect of network-aware games, operating over Bluetooth and mobile networks, gives new opportunities for innovation. We want to create a game portfolio that not only features something familiar, but also totally new game scenarios that gamers haven't seen before."

Another disappointing aspect was the amount of games and third parties announced – though several companies are working with Nokia, only Ubi Soft has signed up since the machine was unveiled several months ago. Nokia is planning on having 10 games ready for launch and hopes to have at least 20 titles available by Christmas. Although many of the games we played were technically impressive (*Tomb Raider* being a particular favourite) the handheld is hampered by a very bizarre button layout that proved very hard to get to grips with.

From a gamer's point of view, the only new games to look forward to are *Ghost Recon*, *Splinter Cell* and *Rayman 3* from Ubi Soft, along with *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* from Activision. Otherwise it was very quiet…

Despite a worldwide launch on 7 October, Nokia has not confirmed any price for the European market yet and we can't help but feel that it really needs to rethink its currently precarious position. It's quite possible that the N-Gage might well struggle to gain market share in a highly competitive – and soon to be overcrowded – market.

We've teamed up with those fine people at GAME to offer you a £5 discount voucher, thus ensuring your hard-earned cash will stretch just that little bit further. With plenty of quality games around at the moment, you've no excuse not to use it...





Nokia's N-Gage could give you *Super Monkey Balls* in your pocket. Then again, so can your GBA…

THE ARCADE IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE ARCADE. WE MIGHT NOT HAVE AS THRIVING AN ARCADE CULTURE AS IN THE US OR JAPAN, BUT THAT'S NOT AN OBSTACLE FOR THE MAN AT THE TOP OF SEGA AMUSEMENTS' EUROPEAN EMPIRE

games™ THE PLAYERS

“WHILE THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THE POPULAR JOYSTICK AND BUTTON ARCADE GAMES, WE ALSO HAVE TO DEVELOP TITLES THAT WILL OFFER SOMETHING NEW TO THE PLAYER”

PAUL WILLIAMS, EUROPEAN SALES AND MARKETING MANAGER, SEGA AMUSEMENTS

PAUL WILLIAMS

SEGA AMUSEMENTS

Think arcades and no doubt a number of companies will immediately spring to mind. However, which ones those will be depends entirely on your knowledge of the history of arcade gaming. Whether you're conjuring up images of Taito, Data East, Capcom or Namco, one name stays constant from the very beginning – SEGA. And it's not just luck that's helped the Japanese giant stay on top of its game (no pun intended) all these years.

“SEGA operates more than 600 arcades itself in Japan, which makes it the largest operator and a hugely successful one at that,” says Paul Williams, European sales and marketing manager of SEGA Amusements, “meaning it has a ready-made audience of people to question when working out exactly what the player wants. Also, it has continued to develop new technology and has always been at the cutting edge – innovation and creativity are the main goals for SEGA. On the other side of the coin, arcade operators know that a SEGA game is a guarantee of high quality, which should produce a good return on their investment.”

With a long history for being the best at what it does, this justification of SEGA's success will ring true with anyone who knows the arcade circuit. However, a company is only as good as its staff and that's why Williams fits perfectly into his current role. From his roots as a child testing faulty games in the back of his parents' arcades in South Wales, through various jobs in the leisure industry to his management of the London Trocadero's SEGA World (one of the biggest indoor theme parks in the world, measuring 110,000 square feet), he's ideally suited for knowing exactly what it is that today's arcade goers want from their games.

“Basically, what I do is feedback to the R&D of SEGA's various teams in Japan what type of games the European market requires and then try to convince it to make them,” says Williams. “A good example of this is *Virtua Tennis*. We were meeting with our Italian distributors and discussing what types of game we required, when someone said that a good arcade tennis game hadn't been released for many years and it was about time that one was developed. We put together a basic game plan and presented it to the SEGA Japan R&D team at Hitmaker. They liked the idea and started development; the game was launched about 18 months later and turned out to be one of the best selling games in arcades ever.” Whichever way you look at it, that's quite an achievement; especially considering the decline that the arcade industry is supposed to be in.

That said, it's probably not as much of a decline as you might think, though it's one that's completely understandable given how far technology has come on in recent years. There's no doubting that the popularity of arcades isn't what it was a decade ago, but after the beating the industry has taken recently, things are on the up again. “In the last twelve months we've seen a small but significant increase,” says Williams, “which has largely been brought about by the large multiplayer games such as *Derby Owners Club* and the release of very strong titles such as *House Of The Dead 3*. Certainly, the downturn was partly due to the advancement of home console technology, but also largely due to the increased popularity of mobile phones. Young people only have a limited amount of spending power – unfortunately, the introduction of powerful home consoles and mobile phones just diluted the spend.

“If arcades hope to continue being successful, it's important to offer the player a different experience to the one they can get at home,” he continues. “Historically, arcade games could do this because the graphic power was far superior to the consumer platforms, but this is no longer the case. Therefore we must make going to an arcade more of an experience. While there will always be the popular joystick and button arcade games, we also have to develop titles that will offer something new for the player.”

Talk might be cheap, but SEGA has more behind it than just words. Through its latest innovations (such as the Magnetic Card Reader system and the upcoming connectivity between the home and arcade versions of *F-Zero*), the company is clearly doing its best to bring that unique magic of old back to the arcades. All we need now is for people to start showing more of an interest. After all, the last thing we want is for the legacy of the arcade to die out completely.

F-Zero AX is reviewed on page 106. It should be in arcades across the UK by the end of the year.



IT'S SONY'S TURN TO PLAY MICROSOFT AT ITS OWN ONLINE GAME…

Even though the PlayStation2 has been online compatible in Japan for some time now (even the likes of *Auto Modellista* have been online out there), we've had to wait until now to get the service here. There's no one place to pin the blame, nor would doing so be any use, but on the basis that the UK is only just becoming able to handle high-speed online gaming, we can understand the delay. With Xbox Live already on the market and doing well, the impetus is on Sony to go one better and stake its online claim. The big guns are already on board – the likes of *Tony Hawk's* and *Final Fantasy* will attract many eager would-be online gamers – but is Sony serious about this continuation of gaming evolution? Oh yes. We test the first generation of online titles before looking to see what 2003 and beyond has in store…

SONY.NET

LAUNCH TITLES





DESTRUCTION DERBY ARENAS

THE PSONE LAUNCH TITLE COMES BACK BRIGHTER…

Of all the titles that have switched to a cel-shaded look, we doubt anybody would have ever guessed at this latest cartoon wannabe. The long-running PSone series reappears sporting a confusing visual mix and familiar game mechanics. Sadly, the emphasis has been placed a little too heavily on the stock racing side of the game – we'd have preferred more of the arenas that the title promises. Also notable is the sway towards the extravagant – with each instalment, an increasingly larger-than-life feel has manifested itself. By throwing in power-ups and the new graphical style as well as fixed personalities for each driver, this over-the-top style hits a series high here.

The races themselves feel a little like EA's *Rumble Racing* – high-speed and no-frills with, in this case, an emphasis on crashes. As such, there's very little substance to be found in *Arenas*; everything is pretty much exactly as you'd expect both online and off. The action stutters at times, and variety in the game modes is somewhat lacking, but while this may not be the pinnacle of the genre it's the best in its class until something better comes along.

VERDICT 6/10
AN ODD-LOOKING BUT FAIRLY ENJOYABLE ROMP

"THIS MAY NOT BE THE PINNACLE OF THE GENRE BUT IT'S THE BEST IN ITS CLASS UNTIL SOMETHING BETTER ARRIVES ON THE SCENE"

"FOR NOW, BOY RACERS DON'T HAVE A LOT OF CHOICE IF THEY WANT TO TAKE THEIR GAMES ONLINE"





MIDNIGHT CLUB II

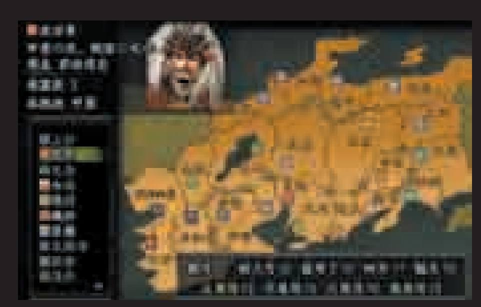
FURTHER TO ISSUE 5'S REVIEW, HOW DOES ILLEGAL STREET RACING FARE ONLINE?

One of the biggest flaws with Rockstar's racer was its tendency to make races distinctly unfair, so you'd think making every racer human would alleviate this, yes? Well, it does, but rather than eliminate our gripes completely, taking *Midnight Club II* online highlights its other failings. Forcing racers to learn every last short cut in single-player mode has the unfortunate effect of rewarding extended play rather than skill. Also, vehicle choice tends to leave little to the imagination and it's not uncommon to see a colourful grid full of the same car. We'd have liked to have seen more incentive to vary this – bike-only shortcuts, barriers only heavy cars can break through and so on.

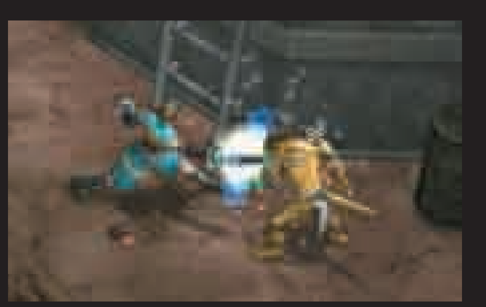
Luckily, the game is saved by its less checkpoint-oriented modes such as Detonation. It's by no means the best racing game you'll ever play, nor is it a particularly fine example of network gaming but, as a package, *Midnight Club II* stands up well enough and benefits from a distinct lack of competition. Let's face it; at the moment, boy racers don't have a lot of choice if they want to take their games online…

VERDICT 6/10
A FEW GOOD MODES BUT ULTIMATELY UNFULFILLING

NO GAMES PLEASE, WE'RE BRITISH HERE'S A FEW WE'RE NOT HOLDING OUR COLLECTIVE BREATH FOR…



Of every online title that we've tracked down so far, Koei's *Nobunaga's Ambition Online* is probably the game we're most sure won't reach Europe. Much of Koei's catalogue is reserved for Eastern audiences so we can't see this medieval MMORPG being any different.



In a similar vein, Sony's own *Arc The Lad* series has enjoyed quite a run in Japan, but since not one of the other titles has found its way here, it's hard to imagine them making an exception this time around. It's a shame too – although it probably wouldn't have much impact at retail, we're sure it would find a niche.



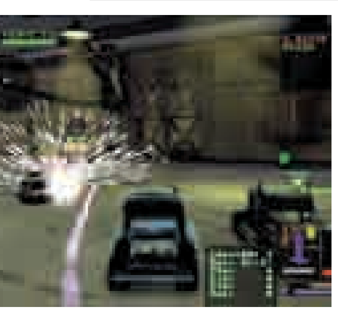
***Auto Modellista* is a bit of an odd case – while we have received the game over here, the online play that was included in the Japanese release was omitted in the localised version. Whether we'll see a revised version with the mode reintroduced remains a mystery for now, but we'll keep you posted.**

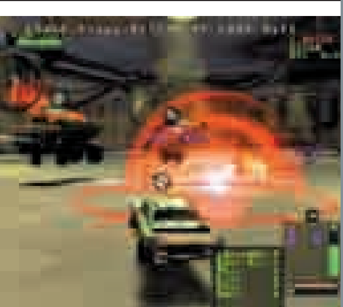
TWISTED METAL BLACK ONLINE

ROBOT WARS JUST GOT A WHOLE LOT BIGGER…

Everybody enjoys a bit of mass destruction, right? But it doesn't take a genius to tell the difference between a good use of chaos and a poor one. As one of Sony's less impressive titles, this is a freebie in the US and it's not hard to see why. The original game had a dismal multiplayer mode – battles often degenerated into cars chasing each other round in circles – and the situation is no better online. No price has been set for the UK version yet but it's likely to be a giveaway, in which case it's almost worth indulging in a little wanton destruction to break up *Tony Hawk* or *SOCOM* sessions. Not the best game to take online…

VERDICT 4/10
HARDLY THE MAKINGS OF AN ONLINE REVOLUTION





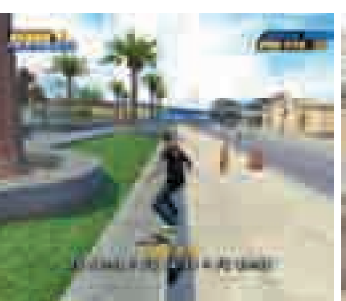
TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4

BUSTING HUGE COMBOS ON A GLOBAL SCALE

It may not be the obvious choice for an online title but our hats go off to Neversoft for a job well done. Although there's nothing beyond the regular multiplayer modes to tickle your extreme fancy, the multiple play modes are varied and enjoyable. The restrictions of the sport and modes mean that extended play is something of a rarity, but as a quick burst of online fun, we defy you to find a more enjoyable way to lose an hour or so. If nothing else, it's great just to sit and watch the petty one-upmanship among skaters. Having a rival trickster raises the greed level and makes a bail all the more embarrassing…

"AS A QUICK BURST OF ONLINE FUN, WE DEFY YOU TO FIND A MORE ENJOYABLE WAY TO LOSE AN HOUR OR SO"

VERDICT 8/10
A LITTLE LIMITED, BUT AN IMMENSELY PLAYABLE TITLE





AMPLITUDE

BANGING OUT BEATS AGAINST THE BEST IN THE LAND

We won't say much about this musical gem for now – we won't spoil the upcoming full review. Suffice to say that online play with *Amplitude* is slowdown-free as the relative simplicity of the visuals and subject matter means there's little need for high-speed data transfer. What is important is accuracy and timing – a rhythm/action game with input delay would be unplayable but, gladly, this is not the case here. The excellent multiplayer modes work very well online and the inbuilt ranking system lets you see how many people stand in your way to musical glory. One of the best online console games nearly on the market.

VERDICT 8/10
GREAT MODES MAKE FOR A SUPERB EXPERIENCE





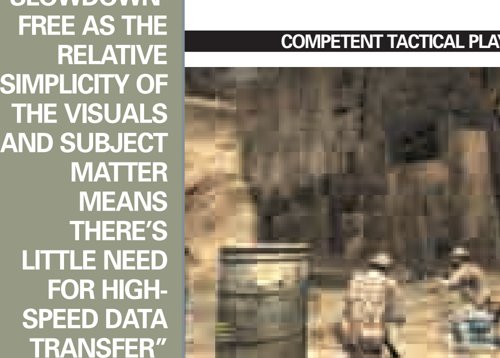
"ONLINE AMPLITUDE IS SLOWDOWN-FREE AS THE RELATIVE SIMPLICITY OF THE VISUALS AND SUBJECT MATTER MEANS THERE'S LITTLE NEED FOR HIGH-SPEED DATA TRANSFER"

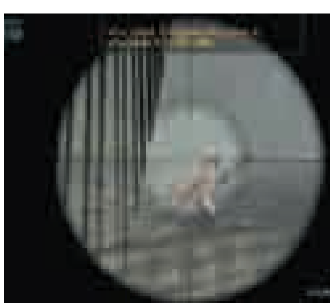
SOCOM

WE COVERED IT LAST ISSUE, BUT HAS THE NOVELTY WORN OFF?

As we're forced to try out so many different servers, we've been treated to a variety of connection speeds since last issue. We've seen the silky smooth games that run perfectly but we've also had to put up with a few too many lag-riddled battles. The game loses its edge when network slowdown kicks in, turning what is generally a strategic shooter into a less enjoyable game of chance. Some servers are currently streets ahead of others in terms of performance – if you can be recruited onto one of these then expect a fair play experience but otherwise, good luck trying to aim bullets at people you can't see…

VERDICT 6/10
COMPETENT TACTICAL PLAY WITH A FEW TECHNICAL ISSUES



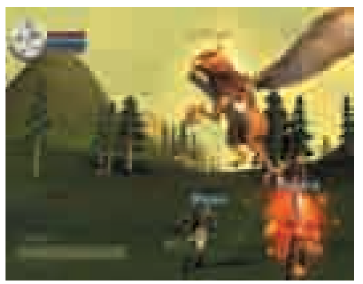


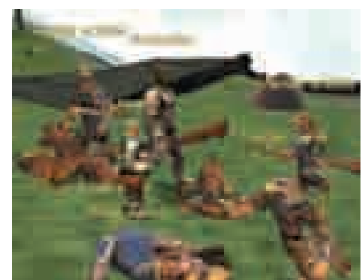
ONES TO WATCH

EVERQUEST: ONLINE ADVENTURES

THE PC FAVOURITE MAKES ITS CONSOLE DEBUT, BUT WILL IT GARNER THE SAME SUCCESS?

MMORPGs are, by their nature, best suited to a PC environment, which is probably why a toned-down version of one of the Net's most popular titles is what will end up on Sony's console. Team up with a few friends and do battle with evil forces as the legend makes its console debut on the PS2 later in the year.





"IT COMBINES PSO-STYLE TEAMWORK WITH THE FAMILIAR RESIDENT EVIL UNIVERSE AND ALL THE ZOMBIES YOU CAN EAT"

RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK

'EXCLUSIVE' IS A DIRTY WORD AROUND THESE PARTS…

Just how an exclusive series manages to spawn a massive online title on a different format is beyond us, but either way we can't shroud our anticipation for this game. Combining *Phantasy Star Online*-style co-operation with the familiar *Resident Evil* universe and all the zombies you can eat, the game should put the popular franchise to good use and prove a real feather in Sony's online hat.



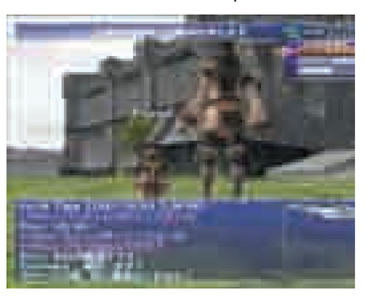


"FINAL FANTASY XI HAS ALREADY PROVED A HIT IN THE EAST BOTH ON PS2 AND PC"

FINAL FANTASY XI

NO CLOUD, NO SQUALL, NO TIDUS… JUST A WIDE WORLD OF GAMERS

The Japanese have been playing it for some time now – even our American friends will be getting it soon – but it shouldn't be long now before us Europeans can drop into Square Enix's first online venture. A true leap from the story-based RPGs the company usually produces, *XI* has proved a hit in the East both on PS2 and on PC, but is it an evolutionary leap or one in the wrong direction? Either way, we're very interested in finding out…







The rumours surrounding *Gran Turismo 4* range from the sublime (over 2,000 cars)…

…to the ridiculous (make your car grow wings). Okay, we made that one up.

GRAN TURISMO 4

THE WORLD'S MOST ANTICIPATED PLAYSTATION2 GAME?

So this is it. All eyes fall on Polyphony's seminal racing series to revolutionise online racing. If it can retain the same depth and customisation as its predecessors while producing an enjoyable networked experience, there won't be many games that can topple it.

What we've seen so far is simply jaw-dropping – it's just a shame we'll be waiting until at least the end of the year for the PS2's online killer app. Check out our preview on page 46, where you can read all about the five hundred cars, one hundred tracks, the updated physics engine… it's all good.



"CURRENT GRAN TURISMO 4 RUMOURS TALK OF OVER A HUNDRED TRACKS WITH MORE THAN 2,000 CARS"



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"KILLING A DEER FEELS WORSE THAN KILLING PEOPLE. LODGE A CROSSBOW PERFECT DARK – HILARIOUS! YET WHEN YOU FIND BAMBI IN

Hunting without the cold or the check shirts.

I'm not a complicated man. Like any other gent, an afternoon may be whiled away reading Ted Kaczynski's manifesto, or lurking amongst the frills and lace of a bridal store, judging the beauty of the city's most imminent wives before even their husbands… regular carefree stuff. As such, there are only three points in my past that can be easily identified as sad moments. One was when King Kong's heart stopped beating at the foot of the Empire State building. Another came with the miserable realisation that my lifestyle was not active enough to reliably power my kinetically driven wristwatch, and the most recent was when I shot a whitetail deer in the head. Allow me to explain.

The announcement by Infogrames (now 'Atari' – yes, and Michael Winner has issued instructions that he now be addressed as 'Stanley Kubrick') of its new *Deer Hunter* game for PlayStation2 prompted an interest in this most contemptible of gaming genres: the hunting sim. Like daily shootings, drunk driving and pastel polo shirts, big game hunting is one of many atrocities so deeply ingrained in US life as to be invisible to most Americans, but so grotesquely self-indulgent and needless to outsiders that it sticks out like a sore hoof.

A short search uncovered *Cabela's Big Game Hunter* as the only available hunting title on a current console. Perhaps this would help me assimilate? Eventually, I could put an end to shameful business like paying through the nose for imported Weetabix. The only immediate obstacle was simple embarrassment: placing such a product on the counter in a shop, actually indicating to a stranger that, yes, I would like to purchase this game. Yes, the one with two caribou on the cover in crosshairs. The one where you extract enjoyment from killing elegant creatures before mounting their severed heads throughout a log cabin. The stigma would have felt no different had the packaging been plain white but for the word 'REDNECK', a large arrow indicating my presence.

Though sold to gamers who can play only until the next power-outage at the trailer park, there's nothing cheap about *Big Game Hunter*. It's gorgeous, lush, expansive and detailed. Grass sways in the breeze, as do trees. The sun rises and sets, casting shadows as it goes. The eight hunting zones are massive, and you may explore them at any pace since there's no time limit. All that remains is to locate some valid 'game' – no short task even with skilled use of animal calls, scents and camouflage. These are flighty critters. I once spent three full hours without seeing an animal.

When the time finally comes, it feels much worse bringing down a deer than it does killing dozens of people. How many virtual humans have we each seen off since, say, *Shinobi*? The death toll must be in the hundreds of thousands, possibly low millions for FPS deathmatch junkies. You don't flinch. Lodge a crossbow bolt in your mate's head during *Perfect Dark* –

BOLT IN YOUR MATE'S HEAD DURING YOUR SIGHTS, THERE IS HESITATION"

hilarious! Roll a grenade into the middle of a busy Vice City dance floor – invigorating! Uncanny then, that when you find Bambi in your sights, there is hesitation. A magnificent specimen, a living celebration of nature's beauty. After an eternity wandering the forest, we're so lucky to catch a glimpse of this wonderful creature, nibbling grass in the golden afternoon sun. But it must be done; this is *Big Game Hunter*, not *Big Game Fancier*. Bang! A high-resolution sound sample describes the weapon's bark, a casing flies off screen, and the camera catches a breakneck ride upon the bullet, soaring over treetops and rivers. Thud. Blood on the ground. We rotate around a young buck as ragdoll physics buckle his legs and twist his neck, sending him crashing to the soil, sliding a foot or so down the hillside.

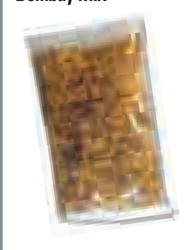
Admission time: this is now a daily ritual for me. It takes so long to properly track and kill one of these things that, after the guilt wears off, you realise there's nothing you'd rather do than shoot another one. You have to put a lot more work into nailing a wild cougar than some moron who keeps popping up from behind the same barrel. Have I lost a cultural battle? Am I a redneck? Well, I'd still rather chew on Suchard than tobacco, so probably not, but – yes, come a little closer – yup! You sure do got a purdy mouth.

Cheers



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Bombay Mix



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Primetime Glick



If he asks you to meet his wife and sister, he's talking about one woman…

WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net … HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

MOLASSES

Treacle. That's it, just treacle. They've decided to call treacle something else just to screw with us foreigners. You can imagine the havoc this wreaked on my baking.



US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Enter The Matrix	Atari	Multi
2	Midnight Club II	Rockstar	Multi
3	X2: Wolverine's Revenge	Activision	Multi
4	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	Multi
5	NBA Street 2	EA BIG	Multi
6	Def Jam Vendetta	EA BIG	Multi
7	GTA: Vice City	Rockstar	PS2
8	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Multi
9	Yu-Gi-Oh! Eternal Duelist Soul	Konami	GBA
10	Return To Castle Wolfenstein	Activision	Multi

(Updated 17/05/03)

Enter The Matrix



X2: Wolverine's Revenge





KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT OLLIE BARDER

“THE SHOP ASSISTANT LOOKS OVER MY SHOULDER AND TRIES TO GET GUY, I SHOP HERE A LOT. WHAT I DIDN'T KNOW IS THAT HE'S A WALKING

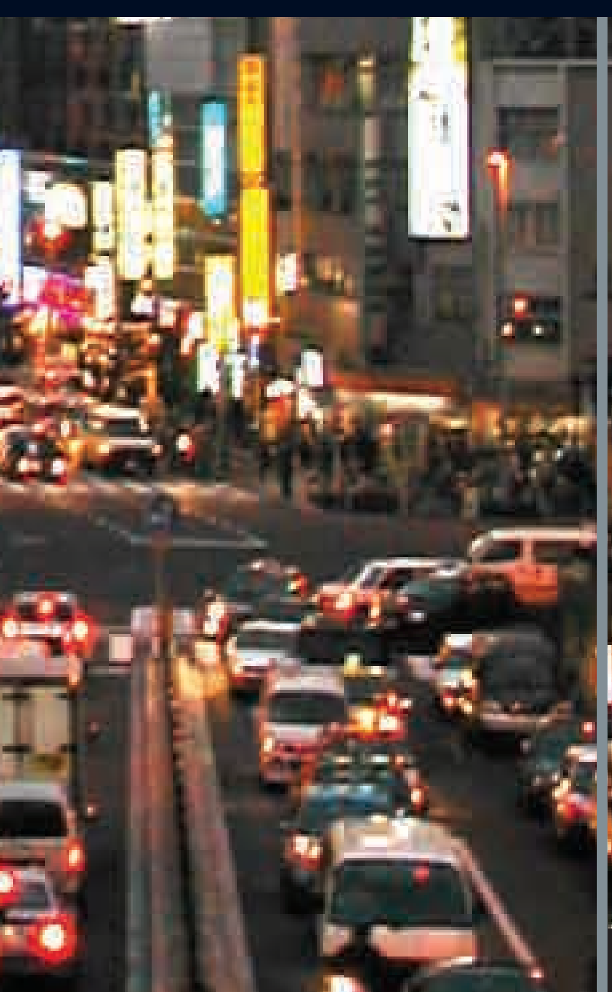
■ Ladies in bikinis *can* offer a legitimate gaming experience…

So I receive an email from a customer, and my heart sinks. He tells me that Sony is releasing some rather risqué software for the PlayStation2, and that he wants multiple copies. Called *Motion Gravure*, these little babies (of which there are four versions) contain various Japanese 'idols' in a sprawling gallery with a plethora of viewing options. From what I can tell, there's no actual game – instead, you have a selection of photos to scan through, pan round and generally ogle to your heart's content. In other words, it's typically dodgy Japanese crap that only people of a particular taste would be interested in (my American colleague The Shape included) but nevertheless, it's stuff that this customer is interested in. So off I go to my local gaming store – they know me and so they greet me accordingly. Naturally, this is only going to make matters worse. Being as polite as I can when reluctantly browsing for hentai (anime porn, basically), I return the greeting and try to blend into the crowd (this is a big and crowded store, after all). With not much effort, I find these blighters and try to surreptitiously confirm which ones this guy was interested in.

At this point, I should tell you that most Japanese people have had ninja training since birth; this means that they can appear next to you without sound or warning. This particular ability was made painfully apparent whilst I was 'examining' these fetid *Motion Gravure* things. Though this was actually just one of many enlightening events that was to occur to me over the course of this fateful shopping trip.

The shop assistant is now looking over my shoulder and trying to get my attention. Now, I know this guy, I shop here a lot. What I didn't know is that this man is a walking encyclopaedia on hentai. Naturally I acknowledge his presence, only to have him escort me to the vast hentai section in the store. This splendid individual then proceeds to cover every dodgy hentai title in very thorough and particularly loud Japanese. Everybody in the goddam store now knows that I was looking at those *Motion Gravure* things. Moreover, the whole event was accented by the surrealism of this guy talking about the “quality of Japanese nipples”. All in all, it was a rather bizarre experience and probably one that has scarred me for life.

This isn't the first time something like this has happened though. When I first got to Japan, I revelled in the joy of being able to find esoteric mecha games that no-one, bar me, had ever heard of – well, this is Japan and the Japanese like their big robots. In this very same store, I was practically assaulted by a very enthusiastic shop assistant; she (yes, I said 'she') was, and



MY ATTENTION. I KNOW THIS ENCYCLOPAEDIA ON HENTAI"

still is, a complete mecha nut and was all-too-keen to make sure that I received all the attention she could muster when it came to discussing her passion. You see, in Japan showing interests openly is seriously bad social form – strangely, hobbies are meant to be a private thing – but if you can talk about your interests in the context of helping a customer, you're onto a winner.

Now, don't get the wrong idea. Obviously, I'm not saying that every Japanese game store assistant will want to be your best buddy when they find out you share similar gaming interests, but you might be surprised how keen they are to wax lyrical about their diverse gaming tastes if you ask them. The only problem is when you meet one who's a complete nut on the 'delights' of hentai… Thankfully, my guide soon realised that rather than paying close attention to what he was saying, I was actually dying of acute embarrassment and decided to let me go (literally). I speedily left the store and made my way home. I will admit one thing though – these *Motion Gravure* things are rather nifty. That and the fact that Megumi is an incredibly foxy young lady…

Kind regards

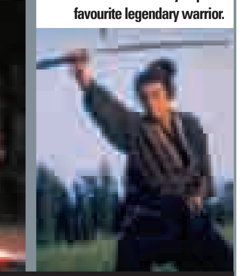


TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON SEVEN: LET'S GO SHOPPING

Sumimasen, … arimasuka?	Excuse me, but do you have…?
Le, watashini dewanindesu – purezento nandesu.	No, it's not for me – it's a present.
Kore irochigai wa arimasuka?	Does it come in any other colours?
Purezentoyoni tsutsunde moraeruto arigataindesuga.	If you could wrap it, that would be great.
Kore kino kattandesukedo panku shiterumitai nandesuga.	I bought this yesterday and I think it's got a puncture.

■ Musashi – currently Japan's favourite legendary warrior.



MUSASHI

One of the better things about Japanese television (I say 'better' because most Japanese television is unmitigated crap) is that NHK (the Japan Broadcasting Corporation) has a rather sumptuous period drama deal, in that Japanese legends and/or historical figures receive a vast and sprawling series covering events in painstaking historically accurate detail.

The current series is *Musashi*, based on the biography by Yoshikawa Eiji. It chronicles the life of the famous samurai Miyamoto Musashi, played by the very famous Kabuki actor Ichikawa Shinnosuke.

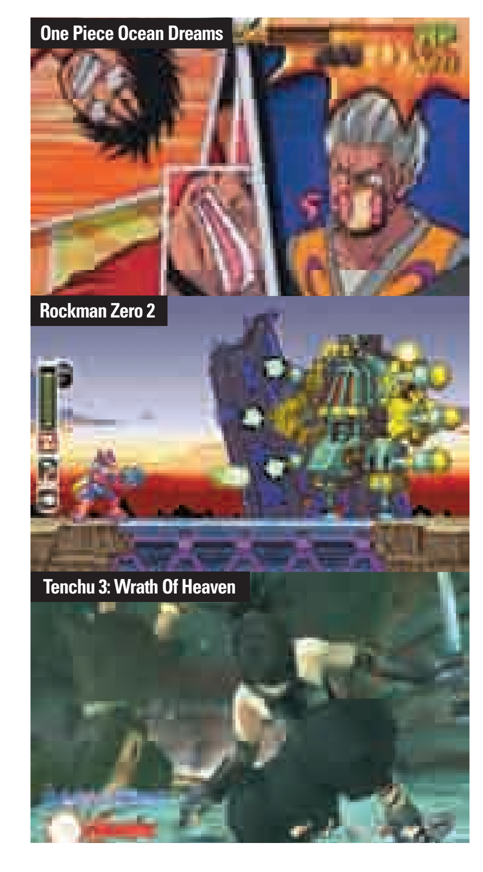
Probably best known for using two katanas in combat, as well as having defeated over sixty opponents and then writing the *Book Of Five Rings* (somewhat inspired by Sun Tzu's *Art Of War*), Musashi is a popular figure in Japan – to the extent that his life is also being currently covered in the pages of a serialised manga called *Vagabond* (drawn by Takehiko Inoue, creator of *Slam Dunk*).

Comics aside, I am very much enjoying NHK's *Musashi*. Admittedly the narrative is painfully complex (and in Japanese no less), but at least it allows me to go "Oooh! Swords!" every few minutes, which can only be a good thing.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	One Piece Ocean Dreams	Bandai	PSone
2	Rockman Zero 2	Capcom	GBA
3	Tenchu 3: Wrath Of Heaven	From	PS2
4	Fire Emblem: Blazing Sword	Nintendo	GBA
5	Naruto	Tomy	GBA
6	Made In Wario	Nintendo	GBA
7	Dragon Quest Monsters	Enix	GBA
8	Yamasa Digiworld SP	Yamasa	PS2
9	Nechu Professional Baseball 2003	Namco	PS2
10	Taikou No Tetsujin	Namco	PS2

(Dengeki Console Game Ranking Top 50, week ending 04/05/03)



One Piece Ocean Dreams

Rockman Zero 2

Tenchu 3: Wrath Of Heaven

"BEING IN A POSITION WHERE I MAKE THE CONTENTS OF GAMES, I WOULD LIKE TO BE CONSIDERED A CREATOR RATHER THAN BEING DEEMED AN ARTIST"

JURO WATARI , HITMAKER CO., LTD

JURO WATARI

HITMAKER CO. LTD.

Juro Watari is something of a shrouded genius in the Japanese games industry. Educated at the incredibly prestigious Todai University, the man possesses an intellect of rare brilliance. He is also the creator of probably one of the most misunderstood and unappreciated game series (in the West at least) of recent years. We refer, of course, to *Cybertroopers Virtual On*.

The latest incarnation of this series, *Virtual On Marz*, has just been released for the PlayStation2, but without its trademark TwinSticks (a somewhat iconic aspect of the franchise). Thankfully, Watari managed to take time off from his busy schedule to speak to us. Originally from Tokyo, Watari admits that as a child he was "interested in history, art and natural science because I travelled a lot around Europe and America. In these visits, I often went to historic places, art galleries and other types of museums and theatres. My favourite countries were Italy and Austria. In America, I was particularly fascinated by American football."

The latter is rather telling, especially in the context of what Watari enjoys now: "These days my hobbies involve travelling, Nohgaku and Bunraku [Japanese classical theatres], reading and opera," he says. To explain, Nohgaku represents both Noh theatres and Kyogen theatres. Noh theatres have been performed since the 14th Century, with masks, music and dancing, and relatively serious stories. Kyogen, on the other hand, is played without masks, and the stories are more comical or cynical with the intention to make people laugh. Both types of theatre revolve around very precise and controlled movements by highly trained actors.

It's unsurprising then that *Virtual On*'s fundamental set of game mechanics is focused around precise and strategic movement, like a surreal combination of both Nohgaku and American football. Admittedly, Watari acknowledges that Nohgaku has the bigger influence. "Actually it seems that my inspiration comes from Nohgaku," Watari-san says. "Nohgaku has accumulated a specifically Japanese aesthetic over the past 600 years. It also inheres a refined sense in terms of literary art. As such, Nohgaku has always been on my mind, but I realise recently that Nohgaku has been something I turn to."

So, with his refined appreciation of Nohgaku does Watari regard gaming as an art form? Well, not really, as he says: "I cannot define games exactly when definitions of art in the West and in Japan differ so greatly. Being in a position where I make the contents of games, I would like to be considered a creator rather than being deemed an artist. In this sense, I consider the word 'creator' to mean something wider and more relevant than the word 'artist'."

This isn't to say that he doesn't enjoy gaming – after all, he readily admits that he was heavily influenced by the original *R-Type* in 1987. "Other than that I used to play an arcade game called *NBA JAM* rather excessively," Watari-san says. "In retrospect, this was the first basketball game that I played. I like games that can be played whenever I am on the spot."

As for the creation of each *Virtual On* game, Watari states that: "The strength of the *Virtual On* series has always been based upon the exhilarating feeling as players experience the speedy turns of combat. Such excellent gaming balance is meticulously built up by the minute adjustments that are the strength of Japanese game developers. 'Gaming balance' in this context means that in versus games, such as *Virtual On*, two players manipulate characters that constantly move at very high speed. In this situation, assuring equal conditions for each player cannot be achieved by ordinary skills.

"*Virtual On* is the accumulation of numerous artisan-esque skills that are rather spectacular. For instance, parameters that control one Virtuaroid involve about 3,500 individual categories, and those that control the Virtuaroid's arms involve about 2,000 categories. In each game, there are ten or more characters that have such parameters each. Imagine the difficulty in adjusting them all so that the game sustains as a balanced versus experience."

Historically, *Virtual On* has been an arcade title but the shift to a home console release is purely due to the change in the global games industry. Yet Watari thinks that gaming has a bleak future. "In North America, giant corporations, with their mass production tendency, will enter into the market," he says. "As a result, the mass-produced, generic games, whose emphasis is on the volumes of sales instead of products being made that are original, will saturate the market. Thus, creators of games will end up in having the same problems as others in the entertainment industry."

Can people like Watari-san keep the flame of originality burning? We certainly hope so…

Virtual On Marz for PlayStation2 is out now in Japan.



THE REFINED AESTHETIC OF CLASSICAL JAPANESE THEATRE? AMERICAN FOOTBALL? GIANT ROBOTS? UNLIKELY BEDFELLOWS FOR SOME, BUT SOURCES OF INSPIRATION FOR VIRTUAL ON'S CREATOR, JURO WATARI



COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** GETS COSY WITH A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH, MONOLITH GET A VISITATION…

THIS MONTH, WE TRAVEL TO KIRKLAND, WASHINGTON TO TALK MOVIES WITH THE FPS SPECIALISTS AND SELF-CONFESSED FILM FANATICS AT MONOLITH

MONOLITH

Frasier, a sleepless Tom Hanks and that big pointy tower make Seattle perhaps the most recognisable city on the shores of Lake Washington. But as you head out of town and across the water, the sight of Bill Gates' humble abode lets you know you're entering some serious software country. Yet Microsoft isn't the only company putting this area on the gaming world map, since some of the best darn first-person shoot-'em-ups around have originated from just up the road in Kirkland. Here you will find Valve – creator of the *Half-Life* series – and *Monolith*, which has carved out an excellent reputation in the industry for the high calibre of the titles to come out of its doors.

"We've been around for almost nine years, but that's a long time in the gaming world," muses director of development Chris Hewett, one of Monolith's few remaining founding members. "And since each project you choose to do might take over a year to complete, you've got to pick the right ones and make a really great job of them because

Monolith Productions was founded in October 1994 in Kirkland, Washington. It now boasts partnerships with Fox Interactive and Warner Bros (to name a few).

■ Of Monolith's three development teams, two are currently working on high-profile movie licences – *TRON* and *The Matrix*.

PRODUCTIONS

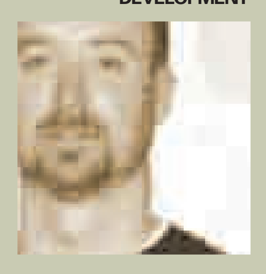
they're going to make or break the company." The studio seems to have shrewdly invested its time and resources in progressively successful projects that have each managed to attract a dedicated fan base and earn the team much critical acclaim. "All our games have tended to get great reviews, but the sales haven't necessarily reflected that as much as maybe they could have," confesses Chris. But with the likes of *Shogo* and the *No One Lives Forever* series parading some of the most polished gameplay of their respective generations, Monolith has attracted the attention of publishers willing to invest the kind of money that can spawn an even more impressive batch of titles.

Right now, two of the studio's three development teams are working with some of the biggest names in Hollywood on extremely high-profile movie licences. Disney is hoping to establish itself as a contender in the serious adult gaming market by enlisting the expertise of Monolith in resurrecting the *TRON* franchise, whilst Warner Brothers has entrusted the studio's talents to recreate the *Matrix* universe for it in a massively multiplayer online game. Combining the quality gameplay of Monolith's previous titles with these lucrative movie concepts may well be a recipe for success, but for the movie-obsessed team of developers it's also a dream come true. "We have just about every movie poster there is in our halls because we all grew up with the movies – we all love them and are inspired by what they do," says Chris, illustrating the point with a peek into CEO Jason Hall's office which appears to have become a shrine for Darth Vader memorabilia.

But were the team currently putting the finishing touches to the *TRON 2.0* project always fans of the 1982 cult classic? "A lot of us were," says lead designer Frank Rooke, "some more than others. A few of the younger members of the team missed the whole *TRON* thing, but I'm a huge fan." The almost limitless creative freedom granted to the team by Disney allowed them to take the *TRON* franchise in whatever direction they wished, and ensured there were no constraints on the amount of originality and imagination that could be injected. "Disney really put the ball in our court with regard to

"WE ALL GREW UP WITH THE MOVIES, WE ALL LOVE THEM AND ARE INSPIRED BY WHAT THEY DO"

CHRIS HEWETT, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT



FPS HEAVEN

SHOGO: MOBILE ARMOR DIVISION PC (1998)

Monolith both developed and published this anime-inspired FPS. Players took part in the action on foot or within a Mobile Armored Unit, and the online multiplayer portion of the game is still a hit with hard-core fans today.

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER

PC, PS2 (2000)

Witty and original, this tongue-in-cheek FPS saw players assuming the role of secret agent Cate Archer. The irresistible blend of stealth, action and gadgetry took place in a variety of exotic locations around the globe.

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR 2

PC, PSONE (2001)

Monolith first managed to get its teeth into a big movie licence with the *Aliens Vs. Predator* sequel. Three interwoven stories allowed players to experience the chilling action through the eyes of a Marine, Alien or Predator.

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

PC (2002)

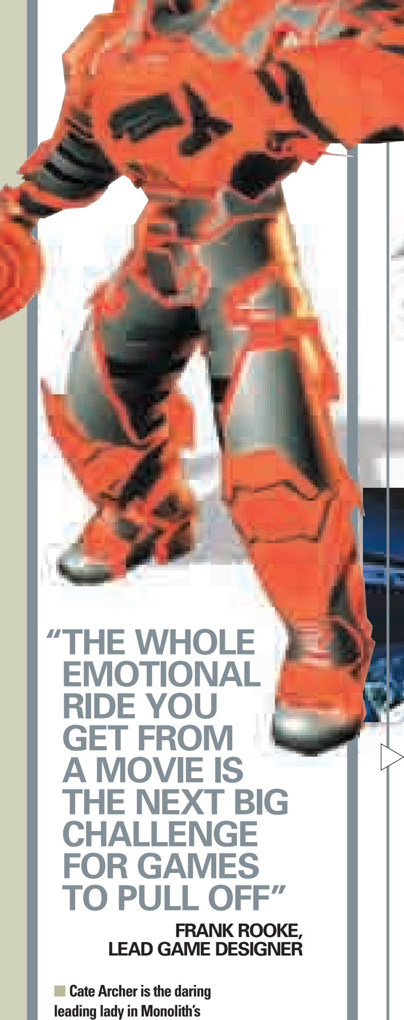
Following the success of her first outing, Cate Archer returned to save the world from the threat of a third world war. Humour was once again the order of the day as Monolith cemented its place among the world's best FPS developers.

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER



ALIENS VS. PREDATOR 2

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2



"THE WHOLE EMOTIONAL RIDE YOU GET FROM A MOVIE IS THE NEXT BIG CHALLENGE FOR GAMES TO PULL OFF"

FRANK ROOKE, LEAD GAME DESIGNER

Cate Archer is the daring leading lady in Monolith's tongue-in-cheek FPS series, *No One Lives Forever.*

Despite the freedom granted by Disney, Monolith has remained faithful to the original *TRON* universe. The House of House didn't even restrict any violent content in the game.

what a *TRON* game might be like and what the whole story could be," explains Frank. "We were given no hard guidelines where to take the franchise from where the movie had left off, or where not to take it – even for things like violent content there was no restriction. Maybe they had some vision of what they would like to see, but it was totally left up to us to take our ideas to them, and pretty much from the start we were hitting what they wanted." While the licensor was a breeze to work with and placed the fate of the *TRON* universe in Monolith's capable hands, some of the film's hard-core fans wanted to have their say. "It was at last year's E3 that the public first became aware we were working on the *TRON* project," recalls Frank, "and while I'm on the floor trying to show our games, I was just bombarded by *TRON* fans saying 'You've got to have this in the game – you've got to do this or I'm not buying it'. But we're fans too, so we know what we want to see in the game and because of that we've always stayed on the right track."

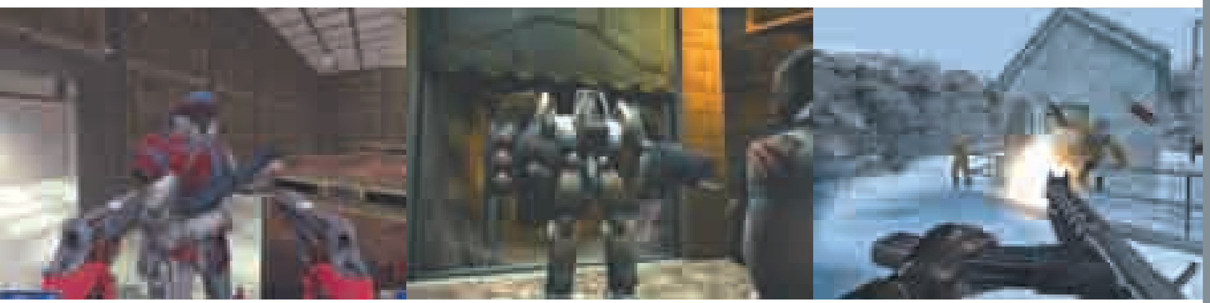
And the word from the top suggests those fans shouldn't be disappointed when *TRON 2.0* hits the shops this summer. "When Steve Lisberger, the guy who really created the *TRON* movie, finally got the chance to take a look at our game we got nothing but positive feedback," Frank says proudly. A couple of other key members of the original *TRON* movie team have actually collaborated with Monolith on the game; notably concept designer Syd Mead – whose credits include the *Bladerunner* and *Aliens* movies – and Richard Taylor who was also involved in the *Star Trek* films. "We had Richard, the art director on the movie, visit us to be part of the project for the day and give us a few visual pointers," says Chris. "It was just amazing to listen to this guy who's been around in the movie business for upwards of 20 years



1 **FRANK ROOKE,** Lead Game Designer
Favourite game: *System Shock 2*

2 **CHRIS HEWETT,** Director of Development
Favourite game: *Gran Turismo*

With acclaimed titles like *Shogo, Aliens Vs Predator 2* and the *No One Lives Forever* games under its belt, Monolith is in a strong position to work wonders with *TRON 2.0*.



sharing his wisdom with us, and it's such a privilege to be able to work with people like that."

With today's gaming technology bringing interactive experiences to life like never before, Chris is fully aware that developers can learn many lessons from their movie industry counterparts: "What's happening now because of the number of polygons we can push and the extremely detailed environments we can create is that you have people like Richard Taylor bringing across such huge expertise in things like lighting, composition, framing the shot and movement of the camera," he says. "These are things that we in the games industry are only just starting to have to worry about now we're able to produce such photo-realism. So when we get people coming here from the movie industry, giving us the kind of advice we can really use to take our games that step closer to achieving the powerful effects movies manage to get across, then we're all for it."

"Movies have the power to evoke emotions," adds Frank, "whereas the only feelings games can really evoke at the moment are things like adrenaline rush and maybe a little bit of fright. I think the whole emotional ride you get from a movie is the next big challenge for games to pull off. Imagine playing *Medal Of Honor* and being totally emotionally involved in it like when you're watching something like *Saving Private Ryan*. If we could get that combination, we'd be talking about something seriously amazing." Fusing their expertise in programming with cinematic know-how is certainly a positive step towards achieving this goal. And the hotly anticipated *Matrix* project is providing Monolith with its greatest challenge yet – to create an interactive universe that really allows players to step inside the movie they know and love.

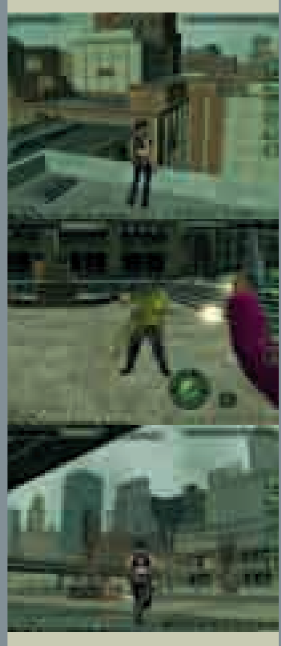
"When we first started talking about getting into massively multiplayer online games, we talked about the kind of project we wanted to work on and which licence would be the ultimate one to have, so we said *The Matrix*," says Chris. "It was basically Jason's job to go out and hunt down that licence, but we still can't believe we actually managed to get it." Yet despite revealing the first couple of titbits at this year's E3, the project remains a closely guarded secret. And as for the third development team? "Ah, that would be the *No One Lives Forever* team," smiles Chris. "They're working on a new action-adventure title, but that's currently undisclosed…"

COMING 2004…

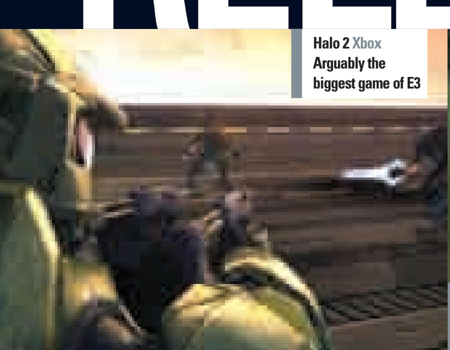
The Matrix Online is shrouded in secrecy at the moment, but Monolith is working closely with creators of the *Matrix* movies – the Wachowski brothers – to deliver the ambitious project by 2004. Of course, by that time we'll have already seen the last instalment in the *Matrix* trilogy, allowing the online game to pick up where the third chapter leaves off.

But with so much happening to the licence this year, will we be left with an even greater desire to enter Monolith's *Matrix* for ourselves, or are we likely to be tired of the whole thing by then?

"It's hard to think of the guys going wrong with the *Matrix* movies," director of development Chris Hewett assures us. "We've got people here who've read the scripts and were really blown away, so I think they're going to be pretty impressive. But there's definitely a risk that how the movies go down will impact how people are going to approach our product, and even if Shiny don't do a good job with their game [*Enter The Matrix*], it could really turn people off as a gaming franchise. We'll have to wait and see."



RELEASE LISTS


Halo 2 Xbox
Arguably the biggest game of E3


Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life GC
Natsume's popular farming sim makes a welcome return


Wakeboarding Unleashed PS2, Xbox
Yet another sports sim from Activision

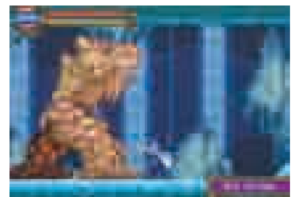


games™ MOST PLAYED

CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW

Format: Game Boy Advance
Developer: Konami

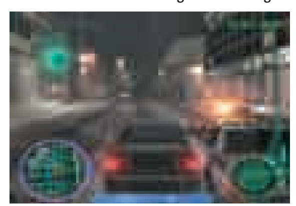
No matter how many times Dracula may get resurrected, you can be sure that we'll always be on hand to send him back to whatever festering hole he's sprung from. Konami's latest addition to its GBA franchise continues to enthrall us with its superb visuals, astounding array of weapons and the wonderful Soul system.



MIDNIGHT CLUB II

Format: Multiformat
Developer: Take2

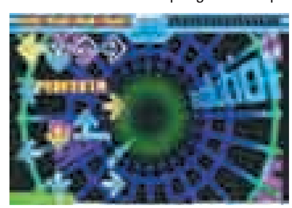
We're suckers for mindless destruction and a quick race on *Midnight Club II* is too good an opportunity to miss. Extended play does reveal that the AI can be rather unfair at times and that an incredible memory is required to complete certain missions. Saying that though, it's kept most of the team engrossed for ages.



DDRMAX

Format: PlayStation2
Developer: Konami

Sitting at a desk every day in order to bring you **games™** isn't easy and doesn't do much for the figure either. So thank god for Konami's *DDRMAX*. Whenever we're feeling a little lethargic a quick workout to MAX300 is more than enough to revitalise our flagging bodies and send us back to work with a spring in our steps.





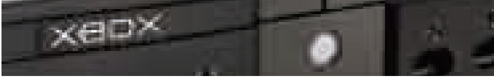
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE			
20 June	Black & Bruised	Vivendi	
20 June	Die Hard: Vendetta	Vivendi	
20 June	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
20 June	IndyCar Series	Codemasters	
27 June	Dead To Rights	Electronic Arts	
27 June	F1 Career Challenge	Electronic Arts	
27 June	Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	Eidos	
27 June	World Championship Snooker 2003	Codemasters	
TBC	Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	
TBC	Robocop	Virgin	
TBC	Run Like Hell	Empire	
TBC	Xenosaga	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh: Duelists of the Roses	Konami	
JULY			
04 July	Futurama	SCi	
TBC	Alter Echo	THQ	
TBC	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
TBC	Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes	Infogrames	
TBC	Everybody's Golf 3	SCEE	
TBC	Gladius	LucasArts	
TBC	Pac-Man Fever	SCEE	
AUGUST			
01 August	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
22 August	XGRA	Acclaim	
TBC	The Great Escape	SCi	
TBC	Falcone: Into the Maelstrom	Virgin	
TBC	Medal Of Honour: Fighter Command	Electronic Arts	
SEPTEMBER			
19-September	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	A Sound of Thunder	BAM! Entertainment	
TBC	ATV Off Road Fury 2	SCEE	
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm 2	SCi	
TBC	Driver 3	Infogrames	Wanted
TBC	Eyetoy	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Evolution Snowcross	Konami	
TBC	Full Throttle II	LucasArts	
TBC	LMA Manager 2004	Codemasters	
TBC	Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	
OCTOBER			
TBC	Freaky Flyers	Midway	
TBC	Pop Idol	Codemasters	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Urban Freestyle Soccer	Acclaim	
NOVEMBER			
TBC	Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim	
TBC	Red Dead Revolver	Capcom	
TBC	Samurai Jack: The Amulet Of Time	BAM! Entertainment	
DECEMBER			
TBC	Bad Boys 2	Empire Interactive	



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE			
20 June	Black & Bruised	Vivendi	
20 June	SX Superstar	Acclaim	
27 June	Big Mutha Truckers	Empire	
27 June	Dead To Rights	Electronic Arts	
27 June	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
27June	F1 Career Challenge	Electronic Arts	
27 June	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Frogger Beyond	Konami	
JULY			
04 July	Speed Kings	Acclaim	
AUGUST			
01 August	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
22 August	XGRA	Acclaim	
29 August	Futurama	SCi	
SEPTEMBER			
05 September	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
12 September	Conan	TDK	
19 September	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
26 September	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
TBC	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
TBC	Finding Nemo	THQ	
TBC	The Simpsons: Hit And Run	Vivendi	
TBC	Wallace & Gromit	BAM! Entertainment	
OCTOBER			
03 October	Bulletproof Monk	Empire	
03 October	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	The Powerpuff Girls: Shock Of Ages	BAM! Entertainment	
NOVEMBER			
TBC	Crash Kart Nitro	Vivendi	
TBC	Samurai Jack: The Amulet of Time	BAM! Entertainment	
TBC	Starcraft Ghost	Vivendi	



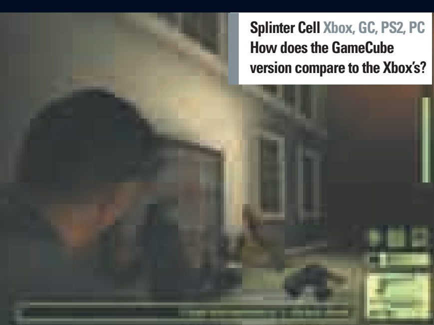
XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE			
20 June	Brute Force	Microsoft	
20 June	Soldier of Fortune II	Activision	
20 June	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
27 June	F1 Career Challenge	Electronic Arts	
27 June	Midtown Madness 3	Microsoft	
27 June	SX Superstar	Acclaim	
27 June	World Championship Snooker	Codemasters	
TBC	Vultures	CDV	
TBC	Knights Of The Old Republic	LucasArts	Wanted
JULY			
04 July	Futurama	SCi	

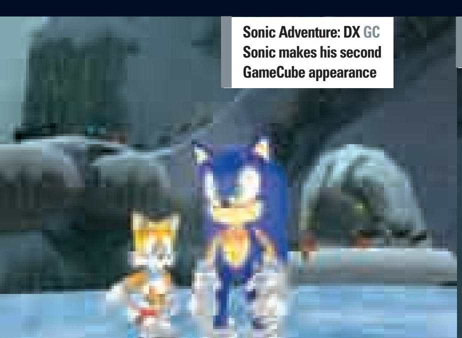
CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



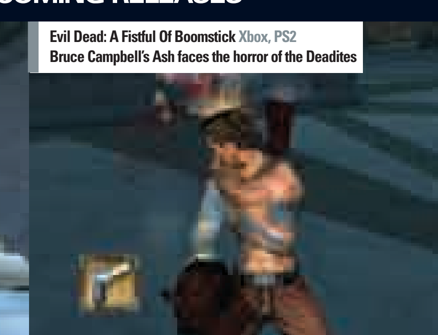
Mario Kart: Double Dash GC
The classic SNES game gets a brand new look



Splinter Cell Xbox, GC, PS2, PC
How does the GameCube version compare to the Xbox's?



Sonic Adventure: DX GC
Sonic makes his second GameCube appearance

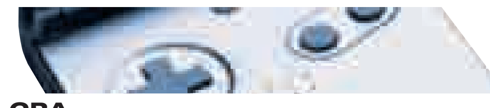


Evil Dead: A Fistful Of Boomstick Xbox, PS2
Bruce Campbell's Ash faces the horror of the Deadites

11 July	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
AUGUST			
01 August	Alien Vs Predator: Extinction	Electronic Arts	
01 August	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
29 August	The Great Escape	SCi	
29 August	NGT: Next Generation Tennis	Wanadoo	
TBC	Alter Echo	THQ	
TBC	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	Wanted
SEPTEMBER			
05 September	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	UbiSoft	
12 September	Outlaw Volleyball	TDK	
19 September	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Black And White	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm 2	SCi	
TBC	Dino Crisis 3	Capcom	
TBC	NBA 2K4	SEGA	
TBC	NFL 2K4	SEGA	
TBC	Painkiller	DreamCatcher	
TBC	Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	
TBC	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
OCTOBER			
TBC	Bulletproof Monk	Empire	
TBC	Ghost Master	Empire	
TBC	Hunter The Reckoning: Wayward	Vivendi	
TBC	Worms	SEGA	
TBC	X-Files: Resist Or Serve	Vivendi	
NOVEMBER			
TBC	Doom III	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Driver 3	Infogrames	Wanted
TBC	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
TBC	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	NHL 2K4	SEGA	
TBC	Starcraft Ghost	Vivendi	
TBC	Wrath	LucasArts	

PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE			
13 June	World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	
20 June	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	
20 June	Indy Car Series	Codemasters	
20 June	Star Trek: Elite Force II	Activision	
27 June	Fire Department	Monte Cristo	
27 June	World Championship Snooker	Codemasters	
TBC	Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
TBC	Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	Eidos	
JULY			
TBC	The Great Escape	SCi	
TBC	Heaven And Hell	CDV	
AUGUST			
TBC	The Great Escape	SCi	
TBC	Heaven And Hell	CDV	
SEPTEMBER			
01 September	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	Wanted
01 September	Counter Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	
30 September	Crusaders	Wanadoo	
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Apocalyptica	Konami	
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm 2	SCi	
TBC	Ryzom	Wanadoo	
OCTOBER			
01 October	Pop Idol	Codemasters	
TBC	Chicago 1930	Wanadoo	
NOVEMBER			
TBC	Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy	LucasArts	
TBC	Doom III	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Far Cry	Ubi Soft	



GBA

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE			
20 June	Barbarian	Titus	
20 June	Iridion 3D 2	Vivendi	
27 June	Hamtaro: Ham-Ham Heartbreak	Nintendo	Wanted
27 June	Magical Quest Starring Mickey & Minnie Mouse	Nintendo	
27 June	Megaman Battle Network	Capcom	
TBC	Freakstyle	Midway	
TBC	Sim City 2000	Zoo	
TBC	Rock 'n' Roll Racing	Vivendi	Wanted
JULY			
25 July	Pokémon Ruby	Nintendo	Wanted
25 July	Pokémon Sapphire	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed	Zoo	
AUGUST			
TBC	Ice Nine	BAM! Entertainment	
TBC	Road Rash: Jailbreak	Zoo	
TBC	Wings Advance	Zoo	
SEPTEMBER			
09 September	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
26 September	Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	
26 September	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
TBC	Finding Nemo	THQ	
TBC	Kirby: Nightmare In Dream Land	Nintendo	
OCTOBER			
03 October	Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	James Pond: Codename Robocod	Swing!	
TBC	Spyro: Attack of the Rhynocs	Vivendi	

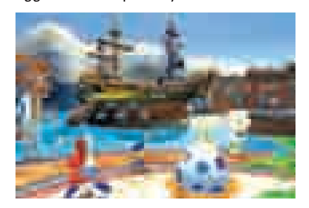
PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, really it isn't. We've got notes from our mums to excuse us anyway.

gamesTM ON THE HORIZON

BILLY HATCHER AND THE GIANT EGG

Format: GameCube
Publisher: SEGA

With SEGA's *Sonic Adventure DX* doing little to inspire us, we're now looking to Yuji Naka's latest creation and hoping it will be everything that Sonic's current outing isn't. So far things are looking good, with vibrant, gorgeous visuals, a boy in a chicken suit, and an enormous egg. How can it possibly fail?



WRATH UNLEASHED

Format: PlayStation2, Xbox
Publisher: LucasArts

With the console version of *Black And White* disappearing up its own backside, it falls to The Collective to unleash the ultimate gamers' power trip. LucasArts is hoping that *Wrath Unleashed*'s options to control armies and toy with mythical monsters is going to be a huge hit; and based on the above, we'd have to agree.



TIME CRISIS 3

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Electronic Arts

At last, after a wait of over 18 months it looks like we're finally going to get another decent lightgun game for the PS2. *Time Crisis 3* will hopefully bring the arcade hit to the home in all its gun-blasting glory. Let's just hope they add more features to the home version as the previous outing was a little threadbare.





DEVELOPMENT ISN'T ALL IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE…



Just recently, I've found myself forgetting how fortunate I am to be in the envious position of working in games development. Although I always wanted to work in games, I never imagined I'd be working on titles that I wouldn't want to be associated with.

It's not necessary to go into details as to why a game ends up being a bad game rather than a good one. Nobody ever sets out to make a bad game. Often, good game designs go bad during development as the result of compromises and restrictions. A release date must be met, the limits of the hardware must be adhered to and those all-important budgets must always be taken into account.

By the time it's apparent that the game won't meet the original design's aspirations, it's likely to be too costly to scrap the project. Working relationships between developer and publisher would be seriously damaged and, naturally, payment for a completed title would fail to appear.

I've found myself working alongside a team of programmers, artists and testers well into the early hours of the morning on projects that we know aren't going to be any fun. We would all rather be making a fantastic, original, triple-A title that'll knock your socks off. However, at the end of the day, we're working for a company in an industry that is all about money.

Making games is a lot of people's dreams but the reality is far less exciting and, most likely, far less rewarding than you imagine. It's a business rather than a dream and a damn competitive one at that.

I'm lucky though; there's a new project with great potential on the horizon. Perhaps if my team, the studio and I use our experiences from previous bad titles constructively, we'll make this one a winner…

Mr X works for a developer in the south of England and (not surprisingly) doesn't want to be named.

games™ FROM THE FRONT

NINTENDO USE E3 TO COME CLEAN ABOUT THE GAMECUBE

THE GAME'S UP

With E3 primarily being a platform to announce recent achievements and forthcoming releases, it was a welcome surprise to see Nintendo using its press conference to be honest about the GameCube. In an unprecedented move, Nintendo's president, Satoru Iwata, stated that the GameCube had failed to deliver in the way that Nintendo had wanted, although he quickly pointed out that Nintendo would not be quitting this generation's console war and would be more than ready for the next one.

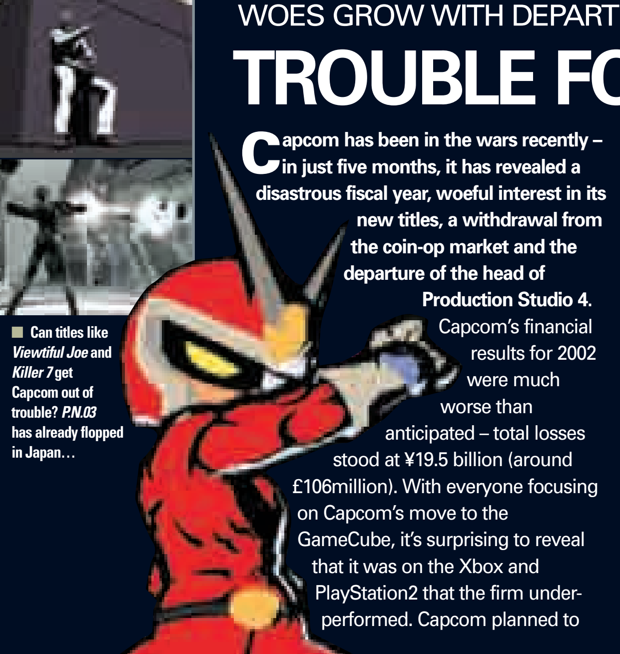
With the recent release of Nintendo's figures for 2002, it would seem that Iwata-san's worries are well justified. Although Nintendo made a net profit of ¥67.27 billion (roughly £350 million), it was still a massive 36.8% below 2001's figures and resulted in Nintendo being extremely conservative with this year's profit margins.

Despite Nintendo's much-vaunted 'connectivity' between the GameCube and GBA, many now feel that the house of Mario is finally starting to lose its magic touch. "Trying to prevent GameCube from dying out is the only strategy left for Nintendo," said Takeshi Tajima, an analyst at BNP Paribas in Tokyo. "When the gap in the market share is this great, a rally from behind is virtually impossible."

Even Nintendo admitted in a recent statement: "It is becoming increasingly difficult to create new and unique games which utilise the full capabilities of new hardware." Let's hope that Nintendo does actually learn from recent mistakes, as we'd hate to see it go the same way as SEGA…

WOES GROW WITH DEPARTURE OF STUDIO HEAD

TROUBLE FOR CAPCOM?



■ Can titles like *Viewtiful Joe* and *Killer 7* get Capcom out of trouble? *P.N.03* has already flopped in Japan…

Capcom has been in the wars recently – in just five months, it has revealed a disastrous fiscal year, woeful interest in its new titles, a withdrawal from the coin-op market and the departure of the head of Production Studio 4. Capcom's financial results for 2002 were much worse than anticipated – total losses stood at ¥19.5 billion (around £106million). With everyone focusing on Capcom's move to the GameCube, it's surprising to reveal that it was on the Xbox and PlayStation2 that the firm under-performed. Capcom planned to shift 8.75 million units for the PS2 and only managed 6.83 million; similarly, only 250,000 of the proposed 600,000 Xbox units were sold. The GameCube was the only console that helped Capcom break even, with a total of 3.25 million units sold.

Games like *Devil May Cry 2* and *Resident Evil Zero* have all sold less than expected, although this was nothing compared to the flop that was *P.N.03*. Production Studio 4's first title failed to inspire Japanese gamers, which doesn't bode well for its future releases. Perhaps the biggest worry though is the decision to axe 18 of its proposed titles midway through development. Although no specific titles have been singled out, these cancelled games equate to nearly 20 per cent of Capcom's output for 2003/4.

This is going to be very challenging year…

PIE IN THE SKY

FINANCIAL GOODNESS A-PLENTY AS PUBLISHERS RELEASE YEAR-END FIGURES

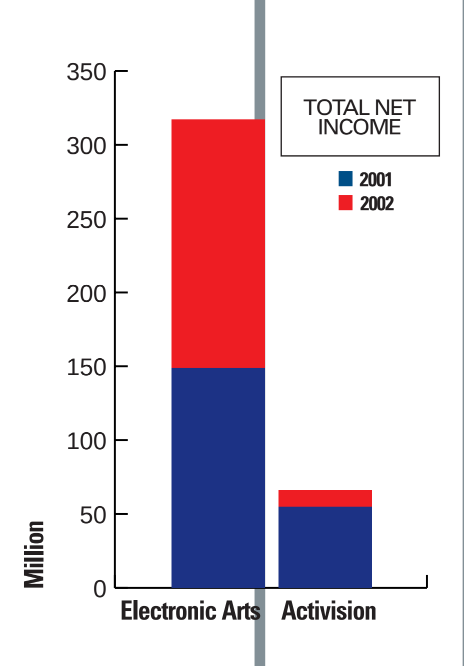
With a new financial year upon us, results for 2002 are being released all over the place by the likes of Electronic Arts, Activision and Midway. Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo's status is well documented, but how the third parties are doing is another matter entirely…

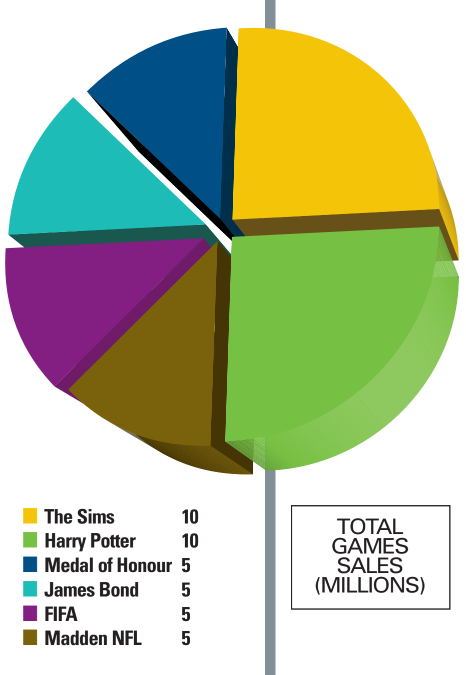
Electronic Arts had an extremely profitable year with net revenues of $2.48 billion, up a massive 44% on the previous year. "This was an outstanding year for Electronic Arts," said chairman and CEO Larry Probst. "The company achieved all its key objectives, and we are the leader on next generation consoles and on PC." With 22 platinum-selling games (over a million units each), and *The Sims* and *Harry Potter* alone shifting over ten million units each, EA has every reason to be pleased.

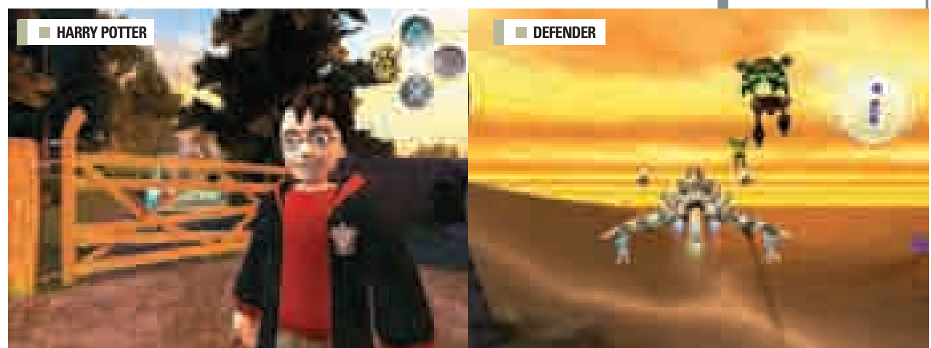
Activision also had a very successful year; whilst its last quarter was decidedly poor (down nearly $40 million from last year), it managed to end the year with revenues at $864 million (about £534 million). Despite this, Activision's CEO, Robert Kotick remains cautious about the coming year due to what he calls "uncertain economic conditions".

Although Activision and EA are in a strong position, the same cannot be said for Acclaim and Midway. Court cases are causing Acclaim all sorts of trouble, with three lawsuits being taken out against it by various shareholders. Meanwhile, Midway had net losses of $9.3 million (around £5.75 million) and has partially blamed its figures on weak sales on the 'Cube.

Although we're far from surprised to see how the likes of Midway, Capcom and Acclaim are doing, we'd hate to see them going the same way as Rage and Crawfish. Here's hoping the coming year sees a brighter future for everyone and not just the big guns.





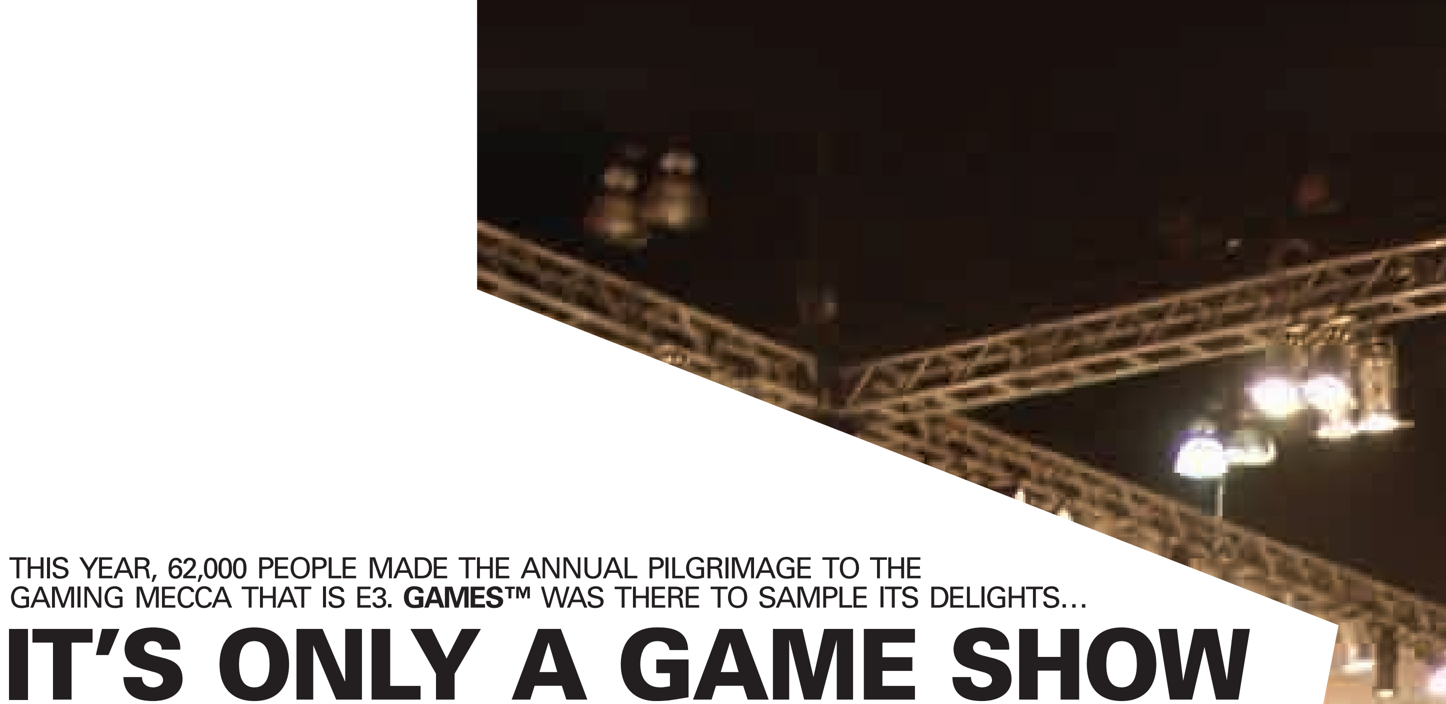


UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	**The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker**	Nintendo	GameCube
2	**Midnight Club II**	Rockstar	Multiformat
3	**Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell**	Ubi Soft	Multiformat
4	**The Sims**	EA Games	Multiformat
5	**Championship Manager 4**	Eidos	PC
6	**FIFA 2003**	EA Sports	Multiformat
7	**X2: Wolverine's Revenge**	Activision	Multiformat
8	**Burnout 2: Point Of Impact**	Acclaim	Multiformat
9	**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City**	Rockstar	Multiformat
10	**Dancing Stage Party Edition**	Konami	PSone

■ Another big Nintendo release, another game leaping straight into the charts at the top spot. At least it shows that people still appreciate a good game when they see it. However, it also proves that unless Nintendo stops relying on key franchises to rake in sales, it could run into problems in the near future. In other news, only one disappointing movie licence in the top ten this month, which can only be a good thing. Although it's still one too many…





THIS YEAR, 62,000 PEOPLE MADE THE ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO THE GAMING MECCA THAT IS E3. **GAMES™** WAS THERE TO SAMPLE ITS DELIGHTS…

IT'S ONLY A GAME SHOW

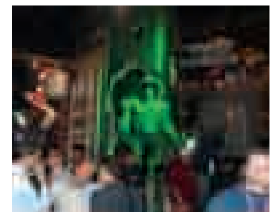
Last month the Los Angeles Convention Center was once again home to E3 – the largest videogame exposition in the world. Though many fondly remember the days of the CES – when the show would migrate from US city to US city – it seems likely that L.A. will remain the favoured venue, thanks in part to the sheer size of the convention centre (all 770,000 square feet of it) and, perhaps, the videogames industry's desire to equate itself with the glamour, glitz and razzmatazz of Hollywood.

With *Groundhog Day* familiarity, the jaded hacks of **games™** boarded another transatlantic flight, braving deep vein thrombosis and what passes for food in the name of investigative gaming journalism.

The opportunity to witness at first hand many of the games that will find their way into your homes over the course of the next year sounds like every gamer's dream come true and to the first-time visitor it always proves to be a tantalising prospect.

Unfortunately, the reality is very ▷

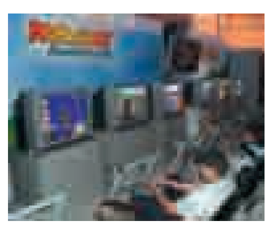

ROCKSTAR













"Gran Turismo 4 was intended to distract from all rival console stands and, to some extent, it did just that"

different, with journalists and the great and the good from the industry rubbing shoulder-to-shoulder with z-list stars, wannabe actresses (skimpily dressed, presumably in the hope of being 'discovered') and waddling 17-year-old 'managing directors' of GameFanZ4EVA.com.

However, as journos dash from one meeting to another it soon becomes clear that, for many, E3 isn't really about playing all the games (unless, of course, you happen to one of the lucky few who are actually dispatched to the show to do just that). It's actually one of the best shows in the world to get a clear snapshot of the state of the games industry and what the future has in store. This is because E3 is about showing off, one huge great exercise in PR. It's really all about the size of the stand, the number of games (be they good or bad), the volume created by the numerous speakers that blare out a deafening cacophony of what can only be described as noise and, of course, where your stand is located. For anyone who is remotely interested in videogames, in a professional capacity or otherwise, anything learned at E3 can prove to be very valuable…

THREE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

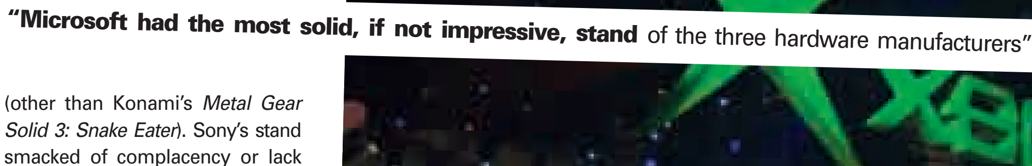
Ultimately, E3 acts as a kind of barometer of the videogames industry. It gives visitors the chance to see the 'big three' and all the other key publishers in the industry in order to judge how well each is performing against the other, but mostly it's to gain some idea of how the current hardware is performing. Previous years have seen Nintendo tending to dominate with tantalising glimpses of its greatest games and most familiar franchises. This year, however, the Japanese giant floundered somewhat with its over-reliance on 'connectivity' – the one thing that the GameCube offers over its rivals.

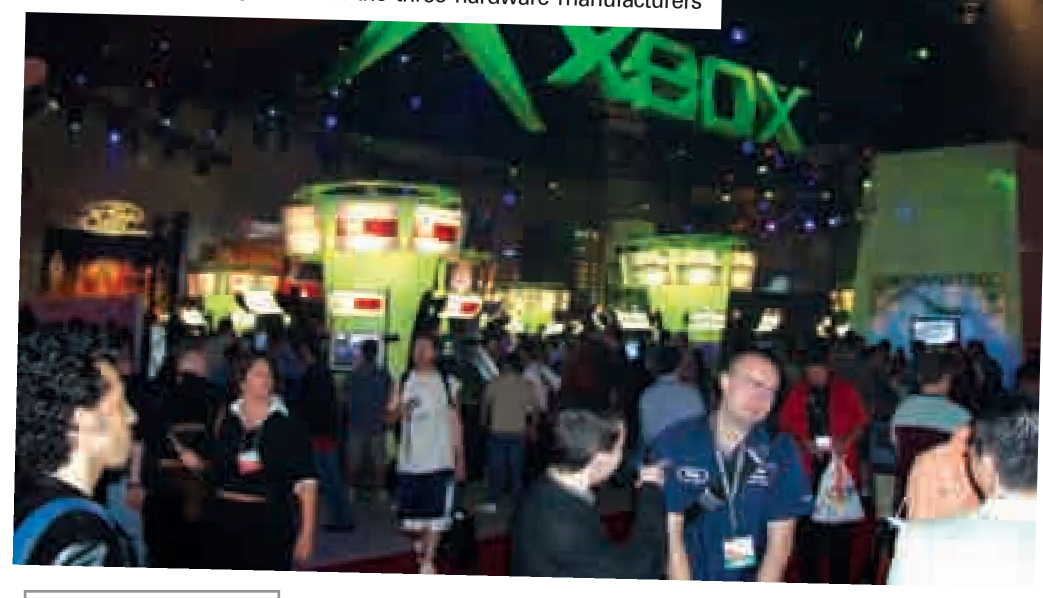
With what could be argued was a fairly muted showing (with only *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* and *F-Zero GX* offering any glimmer of hope for the legions of Nintendophiles), Nintendo and Miyamoto were at pains to stress that the link-up between the GBA and GameCube (and even GameCube-to-GameCube thanks to the LAN link-up) was the one thing that set its machine apart from the Xbox and PS2. With flagging sales of the GameCube, many felt that Nintendo was trying to play to its strengths, namely the GBA, leaving Microsoft and Sony to slug it out in a war that Nintendo simply could no longer fight.

ONE HIT WONDER?

Sony also had something of a lacklustre show. Certainly the announcement of the PSP (PlayStation Portable) could well take a huge chunk out of Nintendo's only strong asset when it is launched in 2004 and might well spell the end of the ailing giant's hardware development. Handheld aside, though, Sony's stand was much over-shadowed by Microsoft. It seemed to have little to offer in answer to the challenge set by the Xbox and, by comparison, its software line-up and broadband service seemed somewhat underdeveloped or, at best, some way behind that which was offered by Microsoft.

Of course, *Gran Turismo 4* was intended to distract from all rival console stands and, to some extent, it did just that, but a cursory stroll through the rest of the PS2 plot presented gamers with a wealth of titles but actually very little to get excited about





(other than Konami's *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*). Sony's stand smacked of complacency or lack of planning and with Microsoft eager to be seen to be threatening the PS2's dominance in the market, this might just have been a costly mistake…

HEART-SHAPED BOX

The Xbox and Microsoft stand fared much better. Having made the mistake of announcing or showing everything prior to last year's show, Microsoft – ever the company to learn from its mistakes – remained tight-lipped about its plans for this year's show to ensure maximum impact. While there were few surprises, what it did show was generally of the highest calibre, with the early preview of *Halo 2* being one of the highlights of the show. It was clear that Microsoft, dismissing any threat from Nintendo, was taking the fight directly to Sony, with a broad range of titles that impressed with their diversity and, for the most part, were visually much more polished and impressive.

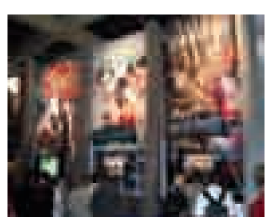
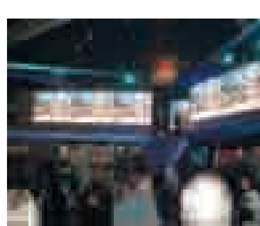
Although the Microsoft stand didn't reach the lofty heights of some of Nintendo's showings in years gone by, it was hard to dispute the fact that Microsoft had the most solid, if not impressive, stand of the three next-gen hardware manufacturers.

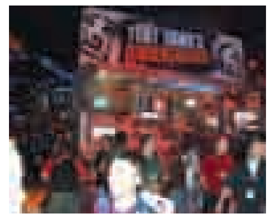
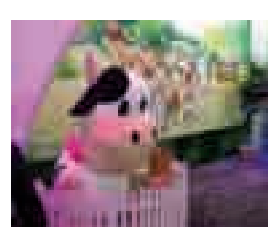
HAVEN'T WE MET BEFORE?

Elsewhere, cautious publishers were ditching the GameCube (in a way reminiscent of the dark days of the Dreamcast) and were backing games that they considered to be sure-fire hits (for that read: sequels, licences and 'me-too' games). EA, no stranger to this, was home to many a familiar licence and sequel but it would be churlish to suggest that what it did show wasn't of an impressive standard. Likewise, Activision relied on a similar strategy, offering only *True Crime: Streets Of L.A.* as a unique product, safe in the knowledge that *Tony Hawk's Underground* and *Spider-Man 2* will be two of the biggest games of this and next year.

One particular star of the show was Ubi Soft. Its range of games impressed both in terms of quality and breadth – of particular note were *Beyond Good & Evil* and *The Matrix Online*, a MMORPG set after the movie trilogy which looks set to take the PC world by storm next year. Though many of the other stands followed a similar pattern, there were a number of gems to be found – check out *Mafia* (page 73) and *Half-Life 2* (page 58) for example.

Naturally, short of chartering a special **games™** fleet of planes to ferry all of our readers to the show, it's impossible to give you anything other than a brief synopsis of E3. However, we'd like to think that the next fifty pages should give you a fair indication of the very best games of the show; the games that you should get excited about and the ones we'll be covering heavily in the coming months. Best of all, you don't even need to risk health, comfort or tolerate a diet of burgers of questionable origin to get excited about them. Believe us, you really are the lucky ones…

HALO 2

WILL THIS SIMPLY BE MORE OF THE SAME? MAYBE. BUT WHO'S COMPLAINING?

When you think about it, *Halo* was one of the most impressive console launch games ever. Cynics might point out that some of the later levels were a little weak and that it all became rather samey towards the end, but few could deny that the AI, intricate graphical routines and sheer scope of the epic battles were far more advanced than any similar console title. Predictably, the game was hugely successful – without it the Xbox probably wouldn't have fared half as well as it has. Even now, *Halo* continues to sell, and with around 75 per cent of Xbox gamers owning a copy it was inevitable that a sequel would be developed. In fact, Microsoft confirmed that the follow-up was in the works just months after the original game was released, though details were sketchy until recently. At this year's E3, however, Bungie gave the first public demonstration of what will undoubtedly be one of the biggest games of 2004.

Improving on the original was always going to be a difficult task, though judging by our first look at *Halo 2* the developers have somehow managed to pull it off. The sheer number of visual effects on display in the early playable demo is astonishing – from the multiple light sources to the spectacular highlights that glint off the Master Chief's excessively bump-mapped armour, everything displays a new level of sophistication. Lead graphical engineer Chris Butcher says that a lot of hard work has already gone into the visuals. "*Halo 2* is powered by a completely new graphics engine designed specifically for the Xbox hardware," he explains. "We're doing dynamic lighting and shadows, per-pixel everything, as well as rendering gigantic, lush environments. The graphical features we're using are so advanced we don't even have buzzwords for them yet."

This time set on Earth, the battle between the humans and the Covenant continues in the futuristic city streets. Although there are still many new gameplay elements to be unveiled, a few exciting new features are already up and running. "*Halo 2* expands the Master Chief's already substantial arsenal with powerful new weapons," says Jason Jones, head of Bungie Studios. "The sequel also increases *Halo*'s number of driveable vehicles, giving players many more ways to speed into battle or explore the game's vast landscapes." And on the subject of vehicles – it's now possible to intercept enemy craft on foot by leaping on board and knocking the driver out. It's not clear how this will work – it appears to be rather staged for presentation purposes, though it should make for some exciting moments in the finished game.

Sadly, *Halo 2* won't be available until 2004, and judging by the amount of features that Bungie is cramming in, it looks unlikely to hit the shelves until the end of the year (although Microsoft insists it will launch during the first quarter). Whenever it does arrive though, you can be sure that the wait will have been worth it. They say that the sky is the limit, but *Halo* has already gone way beyond that – with the whole universe to explore, it seems that the only limitation is the imagination of the creative team at Bungie. Judging by the unequalled quality of the first game, and by what we've already seen of the sequel, the games industry will very soon be witnessing the launch of one of the most amazing titles ever developed.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Bungie
RELEASE: Spring 2004
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16 TBC

Think *Halo*, only bigger, better and even more exciting. *Much* more exciting.

HALO 2: LIVE ENABLED

Predictably, *Halo 2* will use the Xbox Live network gaming service, though at the moment details are sketchy. It's highly probable that the game will support 16-player battles (much as the original game did via system link) though new modes and gameplay objectives have yet to be confirmed. You can also be fairly certain that additional features – such as new weapons, mission objectives and perhaps even entirely new levels – will be available for download as well, though it's unlikely that these will be discussed until much nearer to the launch. We'd particularly like to see online co-operative play, though the massive amounts of data that would need to be transferred from console to console during the epic battle scenes may make such a thing impossible to achieve.

"IMPROVING ON HALO WAS GOING TO BE TOUGH, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S BEEN DONE"



The quality and quantity of the bump mapping is already a sizeable achievement on Bungie's part.

COMPANY PROFILE

BUNGIE

■ Founded in 1991 by Alexander Seropian, Bungie published a string of successful titles, including *Marathon* and *Myth: The Fallen Lords*, before Take 2 bought a 19.9 per cent stake in the company in 1999. However, a year later Bungie was bought outright by Microsoft, and its next project, *Halo*, became an Xbox launch title.

HISTORY

- **ONI** 2001 [Multi]
- **MYTH: THE FALLEN LORD** 1997 [Multi]
- **MARATHON** 1994 [Apple Macintosh]

■ While the visual effects in the original game could be described as spectacular, the sequel is looking even more impressive.

■ Although the regular Warthog returns, a range of new vehicles will be included, including quad bikes and snowmobiles.

"IT'S HALO ON FIRE, GOING 130 MILES PER HOUR THROUGH A HOSPITAL ZONE, BEING CHASED BY HELICOPTERS AND NINJAS… AND THE NINJAS ARE ALL ON FIRE TOO"

JASON JONES, DIRECTOR, BUNGIE STUDIOS

■ Although many of the creatures will be familiar to *Halo* fans, additional animation makes them less predictable than before.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IT'S A LOT LIKE HALO…

HALO x 130 MPH x SPECIAL EFFECTS = HALO 2

GRAN TURISMO 4



Gran Turismo 4 features some absolutely beautiful scenery – check this out…

There may only be six cars on track but it shouldn't detract from the gameplay.

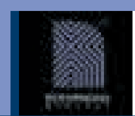
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GETTING UNDER THE BONNET OF GT4

GRAN TURISMO 3 + ONLINE RACING - CAR DAMAGE = GRAN TURISMO 4

"IN GRAN TURISMO 4, AUTOMOTIVE RACING IS MUCH MORE THAN A SPORT – IT'S A LIFESTYLE"

AMI BLAIRE, DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT MARKETING, SONY



COMPANY PROFILE

Originally called Polys Entertainment, the amazing success of *Gran Turismo* saw Sony allowing the developer much greater freedom for its next project and a brand new name was adopted. Since then, Polyphony Digital has constantly pushed the boundaries of videogame racing.

HISTORY

- **GRAN TURISMO 3: A-SPEC** 2001 [PlayStation2]
- **OMEGA BOOST** 1999 [PlayStation]
- **GRAN TURISMO** 1998 [PlayStation]

HIGH SPEED THRILLS, BUT REGRETTABLY WITHOUT THE SPILLS

PS2 **Call us adrenaline junkies, but nothing gets our pulses racing and hearts pounding like some good old-fashioned high-speed racing.** There's nothing we like more than screeching away from a packed start line and watching fellow drivers choke on our dust. PlayStation2 owners already have a massive choice of racers to choose from and it could even be said that with the genre so saturated on the system, there's not really a need for anything else. But when a game like *Gran Turismo 4* comes along, it becomes clear that there's an exception to every rule…

With three classic racers already under its belt and a mouth-watering array of features for the upcoming fourth instalment, it's little wonder that the latest *Gran Turismo* outing was Sony's most high-profile title at E3. Polyphony Digital's racing series has garnered so much praise from critics and gamers alike that even some poor-looking scans on the Internet were enough to throw many a PS2 owner into rapturous fits of ecstasy.

Gran Turismo 4 promises to be faster, bigger and, yes, even better than the critically acclaimed *GT: A-Spec* – with nearly one hundred tracks to race round and over five hundred authentic cars, it's certainly sounding like a mouth-watering prospect. And then, of course, there's the much-touted online mode as well. But there's so much more to this racer than just plenty of tracks and fancy cars.

For starters, the game looks sublime with highly detailed modelled cars and some authentic-looking racecourses. Some clever graphical trickery also enables the PS2 to blend 3D polygons to photo-fixed backgrounds, thus allowing gamers to experience stunningly realised locations such as the Grand Canyon and New York City. Although this technology has been around for ages (*Panzer Dragoon Orta* being a recent example), it's been used to particularly good effect here. Contrast in *Gran Turismo 4* is especially easy on the eye with rich, vibrant colours that easily surpass the sometimes muted visuals of *A-Spec*. A solid 60 frames per second finishes the package off nicely.

It's not just the graphics that have received an overhaul either; Polyphony Digital has also returned to the physics engine and ensured it has received the necessary tweaks to please even the most critical of fans. An updated engine takes into account speed, weight, friction and even wind, helping it to create the most realistic *Gran Turismo* yet. Unfortunately, it's not all good news on the physics front. Despite the rumours, one significant thing is missing – *Gran Turismo 4* will *not* feature real-time car damage. While this is understandable, we can't help but think that gamers will feel a little cheated after witnessing the likes of *Project Gotham Racing* and *Colin McRae Rally 3*.

Even with *Gran Turismo*'s new online racing taken into account, there's more than enough offline entertainment to make sure that prospective buyers will be spending just as long with the this instalment as they did with the previous games. The Arcade and Simulation modes reappear, and with all the extra cars available you'll be retuning and selling to your heart's content. Quite frankly, December can't come soon enough…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Polyphony Digital Inc
RELEASE: December
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-2 (1-6 online)

With more cars and tracks, better graphics and online play, this could be the the real king of the racers.

TURISMO GOES LIVE

With all the fuss about Xbox Live, it's easy to forget that Sony's own online strategy will soon be here, bringing online *GT4* with it. Six players will be able to race on a choice of tracks and, although it's not confirmed, we're expecting to be able to trade cars with other players (though the lack of a hard drive over here will probably mean that the ability to download additional tracks and cars is unlikely to be available outside Japan). The cars have a lower polygon rate than the previous *Gran Turismo*, which we expect is to enable as much lag-free gameplay as possible.

> "GRAN TURISMO 4 LOOKS TO TAKE EVERYTHING THAT MADE A-SPEC SO GREAT AND CLIMB TO HIGHER LEVELS OF PERFECTION"



Once again, players will get a choice of race options, with the rallying looking particularly good.

MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN



Is he friendly? Shoot him anyway.

KILL, MAIM AND EVISCERATE – WE HOPE YOUR BROTHER APPRECIATES THE EFFORT…

PS2 **As developers constantly push back the boundaries of videogame realism, it's inevitable that more titles will use real-life events to create a suitably authentic background to their gameplay.** While many gamers may baulk at the likes of *Conflict: Desert Storm 2* hitting a little too close to home after recent events, it seems that the two World Wars don't hit the same nerve with the general public as they once did. This relaxed view has resulted in a series of videogames and films being based upon the exploits of Allied (and Axis) troops.

Ever since the release of the original *Medal Of Honor* on the PSone, Electronic Arts has ensured that the series is as authentic as possible by working closely with the Congressional Medal of Honor society and well-known war consultants. It's this attention to detail that has ensured the series goes from strength to strength, and after the recent success of *Frontline*, EA is getting ready to send its latest title, *Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun*, into battle.

Rising Sun sees you stepping into the well-worn boots of Marine Corporal Joseph Griffin and taking part in a brand new story that uses the devastating attack on Pearl Harbour as a background. Like *Allied Assault* and *Frontline*, *Rising Sun* will propel you straight into the action and sees Corporal Griffin surviving Pearl Harbour, leading an assault on Guadalcanal, and finally attempting to rescue his brother from a Japanese POW camp in the Philippines. It all amounts to an exciting series of events and will be further enhanced by the fact that you'll now be able to team up with a friend in an all-new co-operative mode.

Although we have to admit to being rather underwhelmed by *Frontline*, there was no denying that it displayed plenty of potential. EA has already taken care of *Frontline*'s initial problems – namely the lack of longevity and shoddy (or missing) multiplayer mode, depending on which version you played – so we're keen to experience Corporal Griffin's exploits.

While the original *Frontline* graphics engine makes a return, there's obviously been a fair amount of tweaking going on. Textures have been improved over the original game, and have been increased in the various locations, which results in suitably atmospheric environments. As good as the new graphics engine may be though, it appears that EA is again taking the easy option and simply giving Xbox and GameCube owners a slightly updated port of the PS2 version instead of working on three separate versions – something that we can't help frowning upon.

Gameplay is being closely observed for *Rising Sun* and with only ten missions to undertake, the series is getting a new spin to ensure that there will be plenty to return to. You'll now be able to make conscious decisions at various stages of the game and will start off by fighting alongside your brother before he's eventually captured. The AI is also being re-worked to represent the more aggressive and desperate tactics of the Japanese soldiers who, in real-life, were more than willing to die for their cause.

EA has plenty of time before the release of *Rising Sun* to ensure that its popular franchise is propelled to even greater heights of realism. Having seen the game first-hand, we're already intrigued by the new gameplay mechanics and more than a little excited about any game opening that could surpass *Frontline* and *Allied Assault*'s Omaha Beach landing…

DETAILS

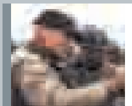
FORMAT: PS2/Xbox/GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q3 '03
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4

Electronic Arts' successful franchise returns with a brand new story.

COVER ME – I'M GOING IN

Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun **joins the likes of** ***Halo*** **and** ***TimeSplitters 2*** **by enabling you and a friend to take part in some co-operative fun with guns. Although the new mode doesn't really seem suited to the 'one man on a mission' theme of the original games,** ***Rising Sun*** **offers a much tougher challenge and so we're more than happy with its inclusion. It remains to be seen if you'll take control of both brothers (unlikely, seeing that one eventually gets captured), but Electronic Arts has revealed that there will be plenty of medals to collect and extras to unlock. Whilst it may lack the additional two players that Microsoft's** ***Brute Force*** **offers, we're more than happy about the thought of tearing through a blitzed Pearl Harbour and re-enacting some choice Ben Affleck and Josh Hartnett moments.**

"EA GETS READY TO TAKE ITS POPULAR FRANCHISE INTO NEW AND EXCITING DIRECTIONS"



CONSULTANT PROFILE

Capt. Dale Dye is a well-known consultant in the entertainment industry and has contributed his knowledge and expertise to a variety of films and games including *Saving Private Ryan*, *Platoon* and *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*. He served in Vietnam in 1965 and then again from 1967 to 1970, surviving 31 combat operations.

HISTORY

- **MOH: ALLIED ASSAULT** 2002 [PC]
- **MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE** 2002 [PS2, Xbox, GameCube]

Who cares if a moonlit night is romantic? Shoot 'em while you can see 'em.

The Japanese soldiers are a lot more aggressive than previous enemies, be careful.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BETTER THAN THE FILM?

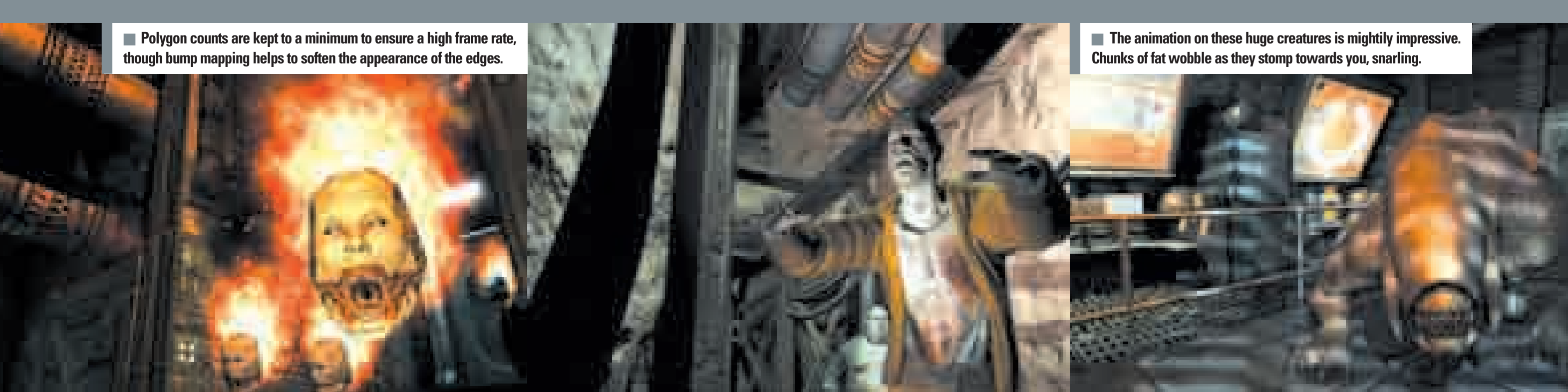
MOH: FRONTLINE + PEARL HARBOR - OVERRATED ACTORS = MOH: RISING SUN

Taking to the river for a pleasant change of scenery. Watch out for crocs though.

"IT'S SOMETIMES NOT A CHOICE BETWEEN 'RIGHT OR WRONG', SO MUCH AS WHAT THE BEST TACTICAL DECISION FOR YOUR MISSION IS"

CAPT. DALE DYE, CONFLICT CONSULTANT

DOOM III



Polygon counts are kept to a minimum to ensure a high frame rate, though bump mapping helps to soften the appearance of the edges.

The animation on these huge creatures is mightily impressive. Chunks of fat wobble as they stomp towards you, snarling.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: id
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1

It's been a long time coming, but now *Doom III* is almost here, and it's going to be one of the best-looking videogames in a long time.

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN SO MUCH BUMP MAPPING AND SHADOW CASTING?

It's hard to believe that this year marks the tenth anniversary of the *Doom* series. Since 1993 we've seen the introduction of franchises like *Quake*, *Unreal*, *Half-Life* and, more recently, *TimeSplitters* and *Halo*, each helping to cement the first-person genre as one of the current favourites with gamers. Of course, updating a classic like *Doom* is a tricky task for id – most new titles offer far more in-depth gameplay than the previous *Doom* games, but adding too many new features in order to keep up could result in the game's unique atmosphere being lost. Rather than risk that happening, the developer is trying to achieve its goal by creating a somewhat simplistic game (just like the original) with an emphasis on grotesque imagery and some of the most technically impressive visuals ever seen in a videogame.

We already knew that *Doom III* was going to be one of the best-looking videogames in some time, though it's hard to explain just how good this looks until you actually see it running for yourself. Metal surfaces create a cold, grey backdrop for the most part, while all manner of vile creatures ripple and squirm in the darkness. Best of all, the animation and collision detection are top notch, thanks to the advanced ragdoll physics being used. Enemies break through doorways, stumble over obstacles, then sprint towards you with their fat wobbling, muscles flexing and coarse, sweaty skin glinting in the light.

Of course, everything comes at a price, and with *Doom III* it's the level of interaction and the multiplayer aspect of the game that look set to suffer. While games like *TimeSplitters* feature many interactive elements (windows that smash and suchlike), these are kept to a minimum in here. Apparently, more destructible scenery was planned, but had to be removed in order to maintain the sort of graphical performance the developer wanted. Similarly, the four-player mode has now been canned due to technical issues. However, it's likely that id will continue to develop the graphics engine after *Doom III* is complete, perhaps releasing an updated version with additional features at a later date.

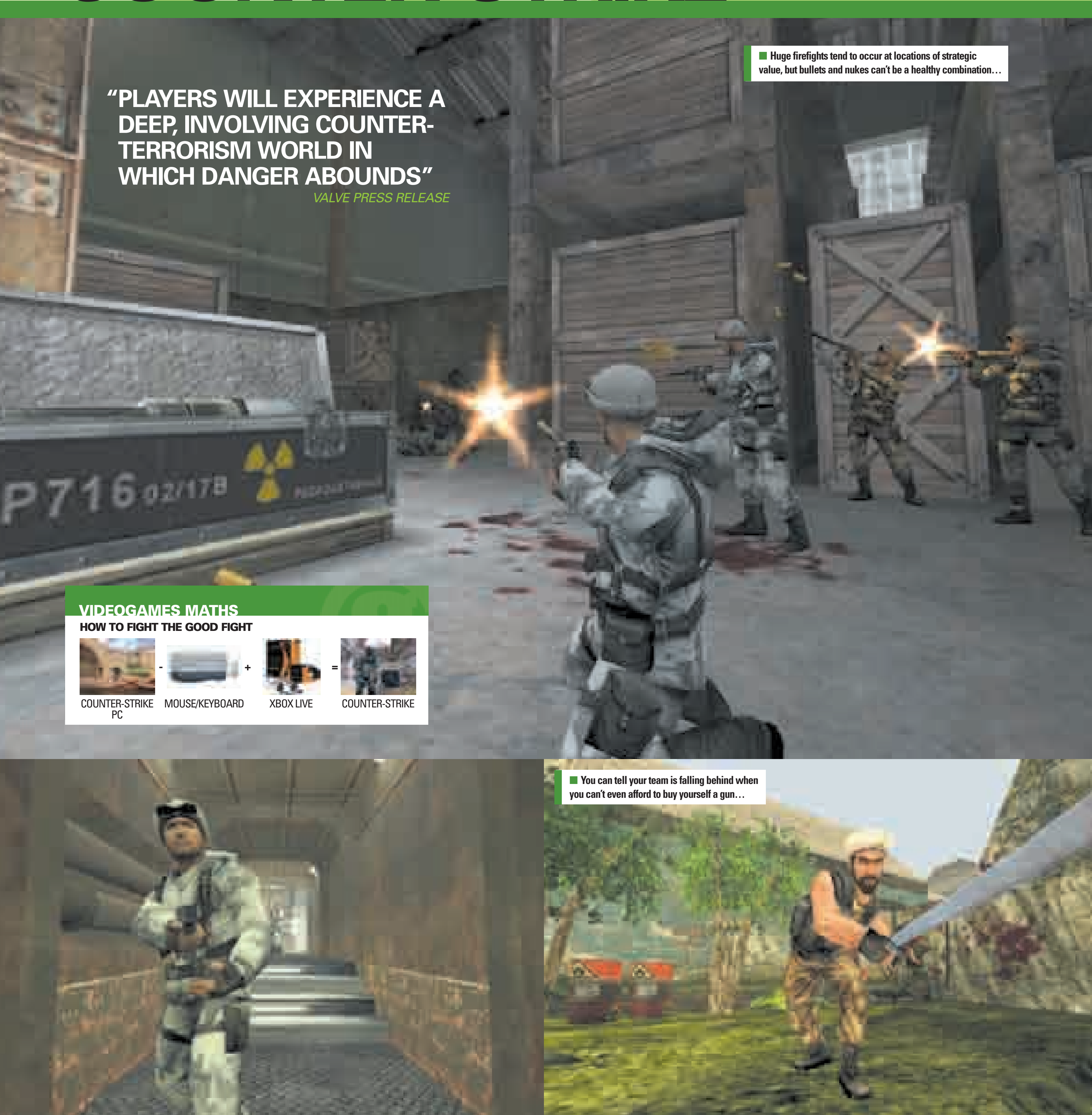
As it stands now, *Doom III* looks set to be a solid enough game, with some of the most impressive graphics you're likely to see on a PC or Xbox in the foreseeable future.

Although *Doom III* doesn't really bring anything new in terms of gameplay, the atmosphere will almost certainly be second-to-none.

"DOOM III SHOULD HAVE SOME OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVE GRAPHICS YOU'LL SEE ON A PC OR XBOX"


eMag

COUNTER-STRIKE



"PLAYERS WILL EXPERIENCE A DEEP, INVOLVING COUNTER-TERRORISM WORLD IN WHICH DANGER ABOUNDS"

VALVE PRESS RELEASE

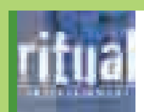
■ Huge firefights tend to occur at locations of strategic value, but bullets and nukes can't be a healthy combination…

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HOW TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

COUNTER-STRIKE PC - MOUSE/KEYBOARD + XBOX LIVE = COUNTER-STRIKE

■ You can tell your team is falling behind when you can't even afford to buy yourself a gun…



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Ritual Entertainment looks to have outdone itself with its first console creation, but between working directly with Valve and its FPS experience, there was never much scope for disappointment. Founded in August 1996, the company's profile continues to rise with an increasingly respectable track record.

HISTORY

- **STAR TREK ELITE FORCE 2** 2003 [PC]
- **HEAVY METAL F.A.K.K. 2** 2000 [PC]
- **SIN** 1998 [PC]

SOON IT WON'T JUST BE PC OWNERS TALKING ABOUT MP5S AND DE_DUST…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Valve/Ritual
RELEASE: Q4
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-16 (1-24 TBC)

■ One of the most popular online games in recent memory finally makes its console debut. Even though we know exactly what's in store, we still can't wait.

Is it possible for two things to be different and the same? Common sense tells us no, but it's not as clear-cut as that, a point well proved by our good friend *Counter-Strike*. During several extended sessions with the game at E3, we were filled with a curious mix of reassurance and intrigue – it definitely looks and feels like *Counter-Strike*, but something's different. Not in a bad way, but we're supposed to play with this… controller? An alien concept, though it's one to which we can easily see ourselves getting worryingly accustomed.

Some things should not be tampered with and it's immediately clear that the translation team knows exactly what these are. Most importantly, the game feels like *Counter-Strike*. The excellent balance remains intact from the start, even with the addition of a few new toys. These include fibre optic cameras to spy on the enemy and riot shields for the full pseudo-invulnerability experience. Expect more gadgets to follow in future updates, both official and user-made. Like the PC version, users will be invited to create their own gameplay 'mods' although these will now have to be approved by Valve before being made available on Xbox Live.

Rather obviously, the Xbox isn't quite the 'PC in a box' many pundits predicted and, as such, *Counter-Strike* has been altered for its new home. First thing you'll notice is the pre-round retail therapy – without the easy keyboard interface of the PC version, you'd think console players would have trouble here. Thankfully, this is not the case and a simple wheel menu means a shiny new sniper rifle is but a stick flick and a button press away. This may not be as quick and simple as in the PC version but it's much more user-friendly than we had hoped. Some familiar maps have also been given a makeover for their new home, with textures and design taking the front seat in replacing the ageing PC visuals. While the core gameplay feels familiar, the general experience somehow has an air of freshness about it. We daren't think how many hours we've lost to the PC version (though it's probably best measured in weeks rather than hours) so for this Xbox debut to have any kind of immediacy or allure over its computer relative is very impressive indeed.

The safety and organisation of Xbox Live will do *Counter-Strike* proud on every level, offering gamers the chance to team up in clans as well as keeping cheating – the bane of the PC version – to an absolute minimum. In addition, we're already promised downloadable content for the game in the form of new maps and possibly more, but a lot will depend on the popularity of the game. From what we've seen, this should not be an issue as even at this early stage *Counter-Strike* is as good as, if not better than, every other Live title. This is no online-only title, though – the single-player campaign will basically be a variant on the upcoming PC title *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, spanning some 20 missions around the globe.

It's unclear at this time whether bots will make up numbers during offline play but we're keeping our fingers crossed – the training and offline potential of such features would crown what's shaping up to be the first must-have Xbox Live title.

ELECTRIC MAN

***Counter-Strike* is set to use Xbox Live to its full potential, offering online play and downloads as well as putting the Live Communicator through its paces. While vocal communication is possible on the PC it's a rare occurrence in a sea of typists, but when every player owns a headset things play out a little differently. Everyone barks orders and comments, groups call for back-up… this is why the headset was bundled with Xbox Live and the game benefits greatly for it. It's unknown whether voice masking will feature in the finished game, but either way team play has never been easier.**

"THE SAFETY AND ORGANISATION OF XBOX LIVE WILL DO COUNTER-STRIKE PROUD ON EVERY LEVEL"



■ Two enemies against a guy with no weapon – we don't much like those odds.

■ Learning areas is a key element in victory but simply knowing where the best sniping locations are is only half the job.

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!



Considering the tiny amount of air in those tyres, they do seem to have remarkable buoyancy…

The selection of Karts isn't as wide as that of characters but there are still enough interesting vehicles on offer.

TWICE THE COMPETITORS, SAME NUMBER OF KARTS. DO THE MATHS…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Driving
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-8 via link-up)

One of Nintendo's key franchises yet to appear on the GameCube, *Mario Kart* is the kind of game that sells hardware. So it'll come as little surprise that this is a make or break title…

Do plumbers have some clause in their contracts that means they needn't do any work if they'd rather be out golfing, racing or generally leaping around? The reason we ask is that in all the years we've been following Mario's adventures, we can't recall him ever fixing a leaky pipe or unclogging anything. Whatever his work-dodging excuse this time, Mario's back on the circuit with an enlarged cast and plenty of new tricks up his sleeve for his next-generation karting debut. We finally got our hands on *Double Dash* at E3, and even though much of the game is still under wraps, what little we have played has whetted our appetites for the real deal. Too bad we've still got six months to wait…

As far as we can see, Nintendo had to either take the series back to basics or take it somewhere new, and it's fairly obvious what it's chosen. Purists may turn their noses up at the increasingly over-the-top feel of the series but this is understandable as the original game was a triumph of simplicity. But such a feel would be nigh-on impossible to recapture in a new game, hence the change in direction. It would be easy to dismiss the dual driver system as a gimmick, but in reality it features much more heavily than previously expected. While your backseat partner is solely responsible for weapons, the nature of what you collect (particularly the special tools) depends on who's riding with you. In addition, the Kart takes on the handling properties of its main driver but by being able to switch characters at any time a new level of tactical play is born.

> "IT'S EASY TO DISMISS THE DUAL DRIVER SYSTEM AS A GIMMICK, BUT IT FEATURES MUCH MORE HEAVILY THAN EXPECTED"

It may not be a groundbreaking feature for the rest of the world, but for Nintendo this first showcase for its broadband LAN play is as impressive as any rival. We sampled the game running flawlessly on eight linked machines, easily as smoothly as the single-player game. While we know this isn't a glorious technical achievement and *Mario Kart Online* would be a dream come true for many, it's still strangely refreshing to see a company doing the expected well rather than making a hash of a brave new venture (although competitive Cubers can now discover the logistical nightmare of TV mountains, console pools and socket shortages for themselves).

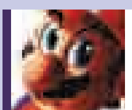
It may not quite reach the visual prowess of the likes of *F-Zero*, nor does it quite have the same allure and balance of the SNES game, but *Double Dash* is shaping up to be an original and enjoyable racer. The number of next-gen updates that end up little more than polished rehashes is disturbing and, as such, we're glad to see a bold move on Nintendo's part. In the coming months, you'll most likely hear *Double Dash* used with words like 'overcomplicated', 'gimmicky' and even 'disappointing' but the much overlooked fact will be that it is not, nor does it want to be, *Super Mario Kart*. Expecting that will only lead to disappointment, and while elements from the previous games do feature strongly, *Double Dash* stands alone as a unique game faced with the unfortunate pressure of having a hell of a lot to live up to…

ALL CHANGE

The three previous *Mario Kart* titles still provoke mixed reactions. Fans of the original will endlessly bemoan the demise of the Feather power-up (reintroduced in *Double Dash* as a special weapon, we're led to believe), multiplayer fanatics often sing the praises of the N64 offering despite its generally cold reception, while *Super Circuit* is often overlooked for its slight stature – the very reason why some think it's the peak of the series. Since the backlash towards two-man karting has already begun, *Double Dash* isn't going to be the universally adored title it aspires to be but it's far too early to write it off yet. We can already see the foundations of an excellent game.

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

GAMECUBE



CHARACTER PROFILE

■ Like it or not, the dungaree-wearing work-shy plumber Mario has somehow gone from a handful of pixels to being the most recognisable figure in gaming in his 22-year history. From collecting coins and playing tennis to scaling the music charts and painting (badly, as we recall) – is there nothing he can't do?

HISTORY

- **SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE** 2002 [GC]
- **SUPER MARIO** 64 1996 [N64]
- **DONKEY KONG** 1981 [ARCADE]

■ Split-screen mode manages to retain most of the visual flair and all of the fluidity of its full-screen counterpart.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BRINGING THE RED SHELLS BACK HOME

MARIO KART + CIRCUS MAXIMUS + EIGHT-WAY PLAY = MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

■ Most of the weapons will be familiar – Luigi looks to be plotting the Koopas' demise in a suitably ironic manner…

> "PICK A PARTNER AND RACE THROUGH WILD COURSES AS YOU COMPETE IN TOUGH CIRCUITS OR DUKE IT OUT WITH POWER-UPS AND ITEMS IN BATTLE ARENAS"
>
> *NINTENDO.COM*

FABLE



While the majority of the creatures in *Fable* are roughly the size of a human being, some are enormous.

IT'S BEEN IN DEVELOPMENT FOR AGES – DOES THAT MAKE IT GOOD?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Big Blue Box
RELEASE: Spring '04
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-2

Take part in an epic adventure in which your actions shape the evolution of your character and the world around you.

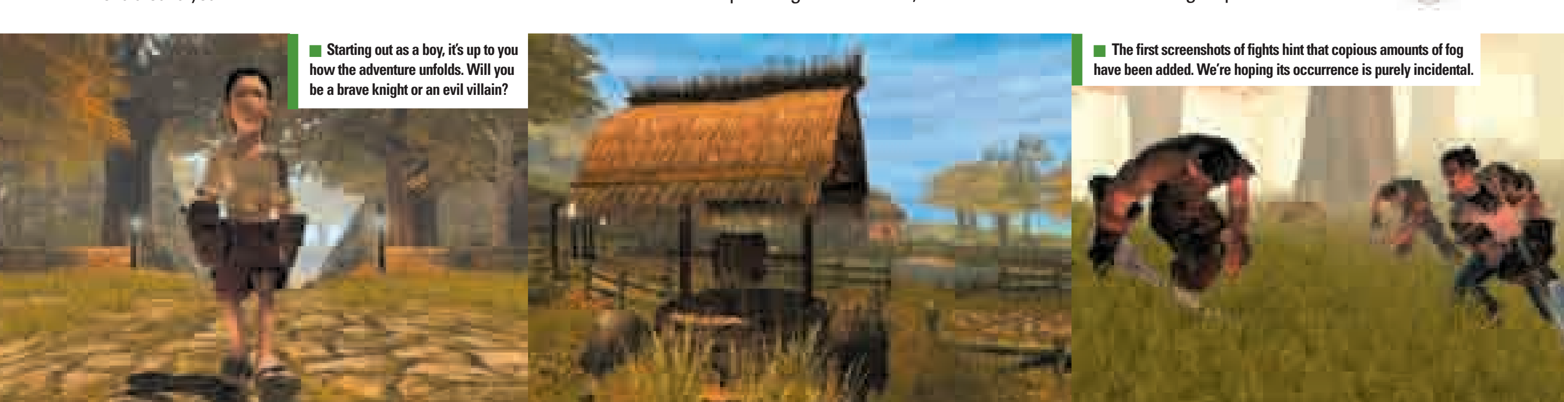
"ALTHOUGH SOME GAMEPLAY FEATURES HAVE NOW BEEN REVEALED, THERE'S STILL A LOT MORE TO COME BEFORE FABLE LAUNCHES NEXT YEAR"

While Microsoft has always touted this gorgeous-looking game as one of its big Xbox titles, specific gameplay details have, until now, remained elusive. It was always clear that you'd be able to shape the look and life of your character – both through the acquaintances you make and the activities you do – but exactly how you achieved this was always a mystery. Even now, there are few people outside Big Blue Box and Microsoft who have had the chance to sample the game in action, but now both companies are being more forthcoming with information.

One of the most interesting newly announced features is the inclusion of sidekicks that can be befriended. While the number of characters that will be able to assume this role, or how long they'll remain at your side, is still under wraps, the implications of their involvement are ingenious. You see, while your sidekick will be computer-controlled for the most part, you'll be able to switch to manual control and use them to test the water in potentially risky situations. For instance, you could use them to steal items from other villagers without the risk of your main character getting caught and developing a reputation for being a thief.

Word also has it that two players will be able to co-operate (much as a single-player would with their CPU-controlled sidekick) thanks to a system not unlike that in *Animal Crossing* on GameCube. The idea is that you simply save your game to an Xbox memory card then download your character into anyone else's *Fable* adventure and join them on quests. Presumably, you'll also be able to trade items and abilities, though this has yet to be confirmed. Of course, the big question is whether or not this will make use of Xbox Live – it sounds like the perfect idea for a two-player network game, after all.

While Big Blue Box has always remained secretive about how far into development the game is, a spring 2004 release date has now been announced. Judging by the complex nature of *Fable*'s content, however, we wouldn't be surprised if that date gets pushed back a bit…



Starting out as a boy, it's up to you how the adventure unfolds. Will you be a brave knight or an evil villain?

The first screenshots of fights hint that copious amounts of fog have been added. We're hoping its occurrence is purely incidental.


eMag

HALF-LIFE 2

AFTER FIVE YEARS IN THE MAKING, JUST HOW MUCH BETTER HAS THE BEST BECOME?

DETAILS
FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal
DEVELOPER: Valve
RELEASE: 30 September '03
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (TBA Online)

■ Gordon Freeman is back to foil the plans of alien invaders in greater style than ever, and with groundbreaking new levels of realism.

It seems virtually impossible these days for a first-person shoot-'em-up to come anywhere close to making the kind of lasting mark on the genre left by such classics as *Doom, Half-Life* or *Deus Ex.* However, that looks almost certain to change later this year when some of the most earth-shattering games in PC history are set to be unveiled – ironically in the form of sequels to these aforementioned masterpieces. And to be honest, we can't think of anyone better qualified to surpass the accomplishments of the 'Big Three' than the brilliant minds behind the original concepts themselves.

It can be easy to criticise big-name sequels for lacking the genius that enabled the original to redefine a genre, but forcing even the most ardent traditionalist to admit these sequels really do outshine their predecessor in every way is a target each developer seems determined to achieve. The result? The greatest influx of 'must-have' titles ever seen in a single genre that's sure to send sales of high-spec PCs and upgrades through the roof.

But while *Doom III* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War* have been teasing us with mouth-watering titbits of artwork and information for ages, Valve has been beavering away in total secrecy on the *Half-Life 2* project pretty much since the first game hit the shelves in '98. Only recently did the developer emerge from its top-secret facility, heavily bearded and squinting at the first sight of sunlight in years, to announce that the project we had all been speculating about was indeed a reality – and would be reaching fruition very soon. So soon in fact, that we'll be seeing it in the shops as early as September. This all seems rather sudden when compared with the long courtship we've had to endure with the other big sequels over the past months, and we're still not sure when we'll actually get to consummate the relationship with a definite release date.

Along with the enhancements to every area of play the last five years of development have obviously evolved, the particular weapon *Half-Life 2* brings to the battle of the FPS giants will once again be its unbeatable atmosphere. The aim is to completely immerse players in another world to an extent never experienced before in a videogame through a combination of innovative features. Much emphasis has been placed on the physics engine which was carefully honed to 'naturally' simulate the physical properties of everything in the game with unparalleled realism. The depth of detail in character appearance, movement and, above all, facial expressions similarly takes the experience of playing *Half-Life 2* to groundbreaking cinematic heights.

With possibly the greatest FPS ever devised to build upon, lessons learned from the original project, and the confidence to invest any number of resources to ensure the game would be in a different league to anything else out there – safe in the knowledge a *Half-Life* sequel was guaranteed to fly off the shelves like the hottest of cake-based products – the stage is surely set for Valve to deliver everything we ever dreamt an FPS could be.

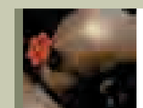
> "IF ALL GOES WELL, THE STAGE IS SET FOR VALVE TO DELIVER EVERYTHING WE EVER DREAMT AN FPS COULD BE"

A MIND OF ITS OWN…

One of the most hyped elements contributing to the sense of realism that is set to powerfully engross players in the *Half-Life 2* universe will be the completely unscripted AI. This system quite literally gives your enemies a mind of their own and adds to the horrifying intensity, as you're never quite sure of the approach your deadly foes will take. NPCs will react instinctively to whatever objects and characters in the vicinity might be of interest to them – which can play out completely differently each time. And with the enhanced ability of creatures to navigate everything in the environment, don't go thinking a flight of stairs or bolted door will save you this time…



■ Character movement has been finely honed thanks to a more realistic physics engine.



COMPANY PROFILE

Based in Kirkland, Washington, Valve Software was founded back in 1996 by Gabe Newell and Mike Harrington. Following its release at the end of 1998, debut title *Half-Life* quickly snapped up more than 50 Game of the Year awards and is now widely hailed as one of the greatest PC games of all time.

HISTORY

- **DAY OF DEFEAT** 2003 [PC]
- **HALF-LIFE: COUNTER STRIKE** 2000 [PC]
- **HALF-LIFE** 1998 [PC]

The eerie atmosphere is enhanced by the astonishingly detailed graphics – time to dust off that high-spec PC…

Enemy AI has been improved and all your foes will react intelligently to situations and other characters.

"IF IT LOOKS LIKE WOOD, THEN IT SOUNDS LIKE WOOD AND IF YOU SHOOT IT, IT'LL FRAGMENT LIKE WOOD"

GABE NEWELL, MANAGING DIRECTOR, VALVE SOFTWARE

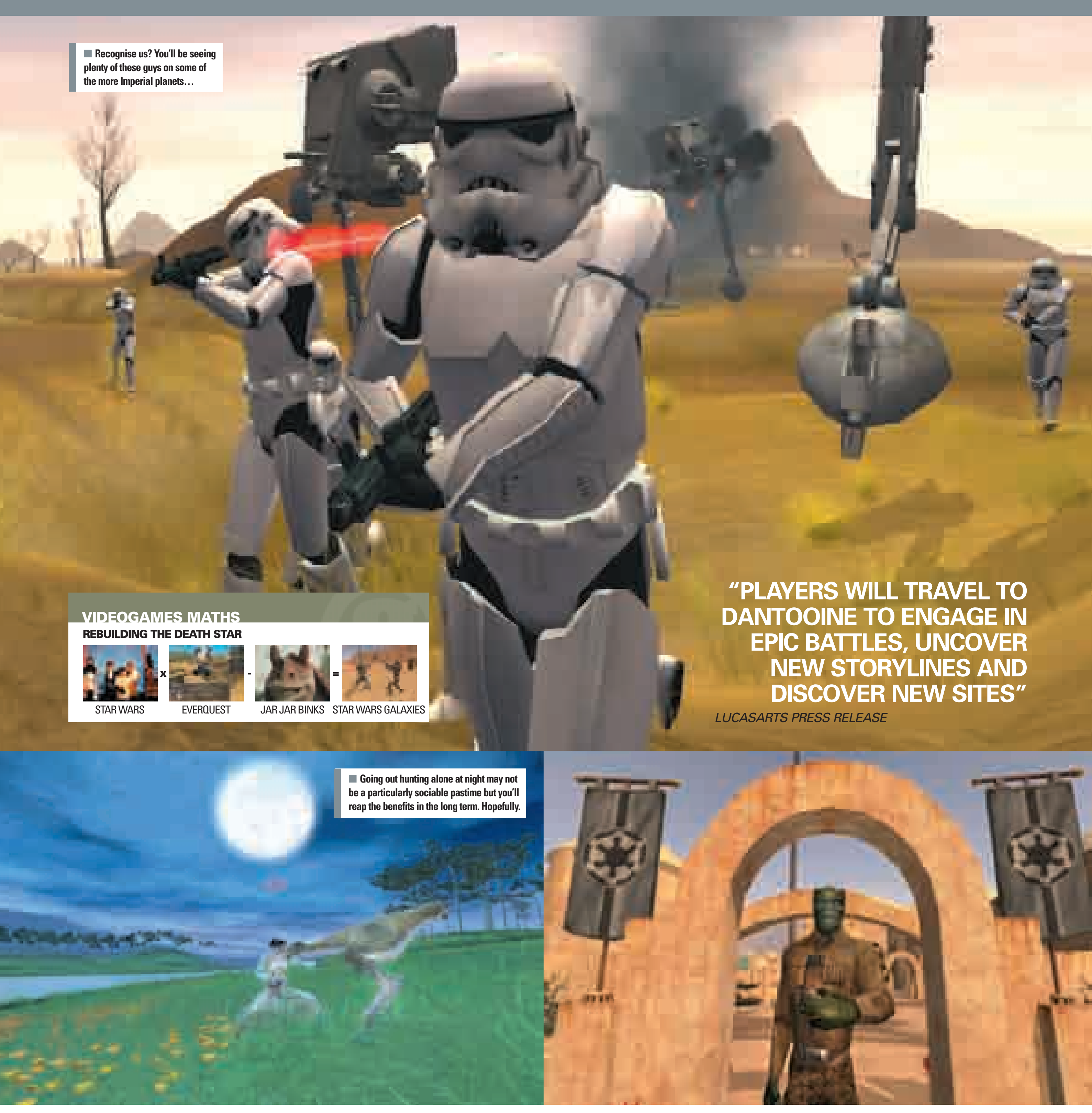
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE

HALF-LIFE + REAL-WORLD PHYSICS + AUTONOMOUS AI = HALF-LIFE 2

The number of online players who can take part has yet to be confirmed, but it looks like you need plenty of help.

STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED



■ Recognise us? You'll be seeing plenty of these guys on some of the more Imperial planets…

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

REBUILDING THE DEATH STAR

STAR WARS x EVERQUEST - JAR JAR BINKS = STAR WARS GALAXIES

"PLAYERS WILL TRAVEL TO DANTOOINE TO ENGAGE IN EPIC BATTLES, UNCOVER NEW STORYLINES AND DISCOVER NEW SITES"

LUCASARTS PRESS RELEASE

■ Going out hunting alone at night may not be a particularly sociable pastime but you'll reap the benefits in the long term. Hopefully.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Considering *Galaxies* is due on Xbox later in the year, it's interesting to note that Sony itself is behind development of the title. With popular franchises like *EverQuest* and strong newcomer *Planetside* to its name, it's fair to say that we're confident in the abilities of Sony's Online Entertainment team.

HISTORY

- **EVERQUEST ONLINE ADVENTURES** 2003 [PS2]
- **PLANETSIDE** 2003 [PC]
- **EVERQUEST** 1999 [PC]

THIS IS NOT THE LETDOWN YOU'RE LOOKING FOR…

Much as it may feel quite the opposite, the delay of a game's release is often a good sign. A little extra time in development is sometimes all a title needs to evolve from promising to impressive. From the shoddiest licensed cash-ins to the mighty *Halo*, there are few games where a little extra work wouldn't be beneficial, and there aren't many games as set for a fall as *Galaxies*. That's not to say that it isn't looking good, more that keeping us waiting and sporting one of the world's biggest licences has given the first *Star Wars* RPG a hell of a lot to live up to.

After the hype cloud settles, you're confronted with what is effectively a fairly impressive MMORPG set in a familiar galaxy far, far away. The whole thing seems to have been built with expansion in mind, so we're confident that the initial eight races won't be the only ones on offer for long. That said, the customisation options available are varied and plentiful – while claims of no two identical characters may be a little optimistic, there's certainly enough freedom to create a recognisable and (virtually) unique alter ego to your own specifications. As well as race and appearance, you'll select a starting profession for your character. Much like job progression in *The Sims* (only far more involved), you'll be able to earn promotions and many more new roles than the six that are initially offered. For instance, training to be a Jedi is set to be among the hardest tasks in the game, so don't expect to be able to simply pick 'Jedi' from a list at the start. Still, some things are worth working for…

Terrain and settlements are advancing every bit as well as hoped. Spanning ten interconnected worlds of around 250 square kilometres each, they encompass some of the most familiar locales in sci-fi cinema – we bumped into Han and Chewie (both in NPC form) in the Mos Eisley Cantina but we're assured such familiar faces won't just sit still and fight off crowds of adoring fans in the final version. You can pretty much guarantee that many of the recognisable stars (as well as much of the 'straight-to-action-figure' cast) will be lurking out there, and with the promise of a space flight add-on shortly after release, there won't be many places to hide. This will give players the chance to buy their own vehicle and take it to the stars. Why this hasn't been included in the initial game (and subsequent console version, most likely) is a mystery, but given its scope and potential, we'll be glad to see it in any form.

Perhaps one of the neatest parts of *Galaxies* so far is the ease with which the sci-fi universe fits straight into an MMORPG. With character growth firmly in the player's hands and dependant on his/her profession (bounty hunters improve by bringing in the wanted while entertainers can advance by wowing a crowd), you could, in theory, play through the game for years without entering a single hostile situation – perhaps not the gaming nirvana an *Unreal* fan seeks but the fact remains that the choice really is yours. The game is now nearing the end of beta testing on PC and the reception seems to be mostly favourable. It may not be the most original example of its genre but the combination of familiarity and solidity could win through at the game's launch.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC/Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: LucasArts
DEVELOPER: Sony Online Entertainment
RELEASE: Q4
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

■ It may be taking its sweet time in getting to us but at least it's not without good reason – *Galaxies* is finally taking shape.

CLOSED FOR BUSINESS

One of the key features of *Galaxies* is the emphasis on the player creating and distributing goods themselves. About 95 per cent of in-game objects from Blasters to outfits will have to be created by a player somewhere and sold on before you'll be able to add them to your inventory – if your usual armourer isn't around, you may have to go without. The other option is, of course, to learn a trade yourself – if you can't make the items you need, at least you can make something to exchange for the essentials. If you've chosen to become a Jedi, you may even have to build your own Lightsaber…

"ONE OF THE NEATEST PARTS OF GALAXIES IS THE EASE WITH WHICH THE SCI-FI UNIVERSE FITS INTO AN MMORPG"

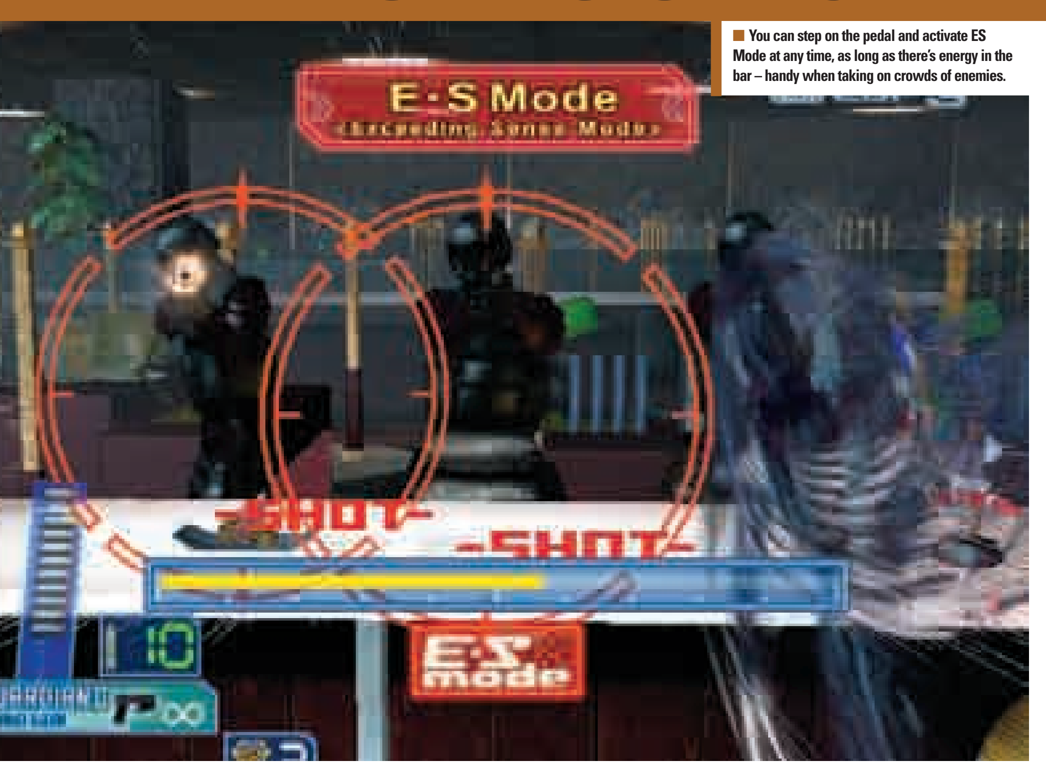


■ Well, there's Jabba, Boba, even C-3PO but, criminally, no Leia in a metal bikini.



■ Expect droids to be at your mercy – NPCs tend to do everything possible to keep the player happy.

VIRTUA COP 3



You can step on the pedal and activate ES Mode at any time, as long as there's energy in the bar – handy when taking on crowds of enemies.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Arcade
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: SEGA AM2
RELEASE: July '03 (Japan/US: Out Now)
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-2

The boys from the Virtua City PD are back doing what they do best – blowing away blokes with big coloured targets around them.

BAD BOYS, BAD BOYS – WATCHA GONNA DO?

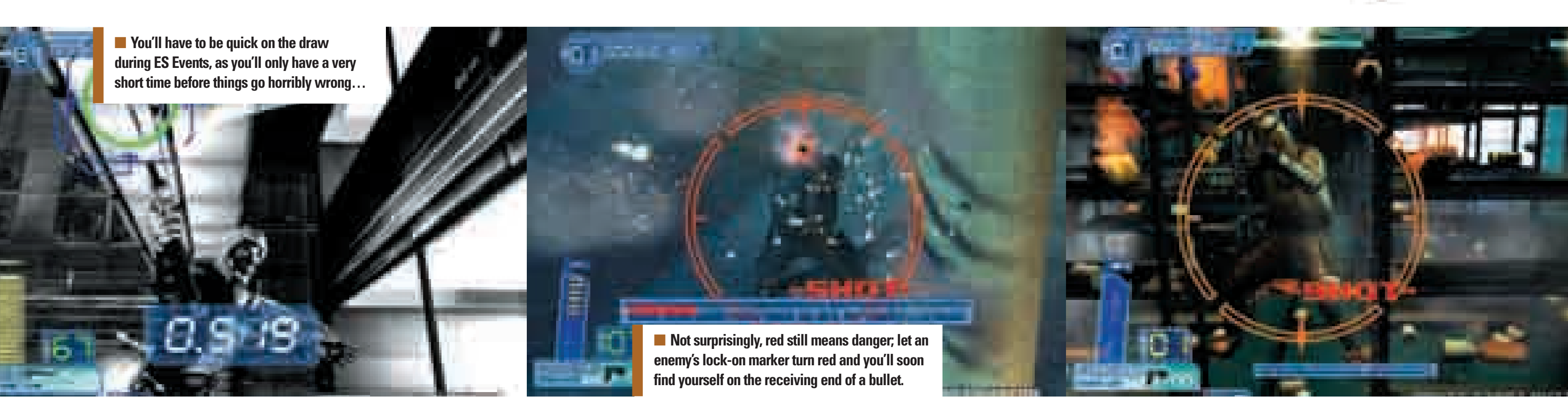
"DESPITE HAVING SOME SUBTLE TWEAKS, VIRTUA COP 3 ISN'T ALL THAT DIFFERENT FROM THE FIRST GAME"

You might not believe it but it's actually been eight long years since we've seen an AM2 *Virtua Cop* game appear in the arcades. Why it's taken Yu Suzuki's studio so long to come up with a proper third instalment of the pioneering lightgun series is beyond us, but it seems the sudden resurgence in the UK arcade market has been enough of a reason for the game to finally head to our shores in the next few months.

As you'd expect from a game that wears its heritage so boldly on its sleeve, *Virtua Cop 3* is more of an evolution than a completely new title. Unlike *Time Crisis 3* (which all but lost the time limit concept of the original game, thus contradicting the title somewhat), AM2's new *Virtua Cop* title holds true to its roots by offering the same stalwart gameplay it always has; bad men pop up on screen with coloured circles round them and you shoot them in the head. Or chest. Or arm, if you're feeling particularly merciful and want the recognition of those tough-but-fair Justice Shots.

Still, that's not to say that the game hasn't been improved – several new elements have been included in *Virtua Cop 3* to help keep the series fresh and in line with the competition. For instance, there's the addition of a foot pedal that players can step on to activate the special ES (Exceeding Sense) mode. To all intents and purposes, this is basically a *Virtua Cop* version of bullet-time – hit the pedal and the action on the screen will slow down (as long as there's energy in the ES meter), allowing you to take on large crowds of enemies at once and avoid damage by shooting oncoming bullets out of the air. There's also a new Weapon Change system that allows you to save the more powerful guns that can be picked up as the game progresses, rather than having to use them up straight away, as well as a tweaked reloading system that helps keep the action on screen rather than off.

With its combination of tried-and-tested gameplay and subtle new improvements, *Virtua Cop 3* looks set to be a welcome addition to the franchise and one that will have fans raising their lightguns in celebration.



You'll have to be quick on the draw during ES Events, as you'll only have a very short time before things go horribly wrong…

Not surprisingly, red still means danger; let an enemy's lock-on marker turn red and you'll soon find yourself on the receiving end of a bullet.


eMag

HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BREAKING DOWN HARVEST MOON INTO A LOVELY MULCH

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE - JAMES STEWART + FARM ANIMALS = HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE

■ You may not be able to talk to the animals, but there's nothing stopping you from grooming them, feeding them… you get the picture.

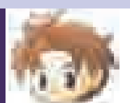
"THE LATEST TITLES WILL BRING MANY EXCITING NEW ELEMENTS TO THE SERIES"

SALLY CORMACK, PRODUCT MANAGER, UBI SOFT

■ With *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life* taking place over 30 years, the scenery was bound to change. We love taking a stroll through the spring woods.

HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE

GAMECUBE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Natsume started publishing games in 1990. Although it produced some well-received titles like *SCAT (Special Cybernetic Attack Team)* and *Shadow Of The Ninja* on the NES, its calling card arrived in 1997. *Harvest Moon* was a refreshing spin on the RPG format and is now Natsume's most successful franchise.

HISTORY

- **LEGEND OF THE RIVER KING** 1999 [GBC]
- **WILD GUNS** 1994 [SNES]
- **SHADOW OF THE NINJA** 1991 [NES]

MILK COWS, FEED HENS AND SOW YOUR WILD OATS – ALL FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR CHAIR

For many gamers, the thought of playing a farmer doesn't seem like the ideal way to wind down after a stressful day in the office. We want to be going on murderous rampages in *GTA: Vice City* or filling Covenant scum from *Halo* with hot plasma. We certainly don't want to be haggling over the price of corn or going through the rigmarole of having to woo a wife… or do we?

Rest assured that while *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life* may sound like a chore, it's actually anything but – Natsume has taken the core elements of the original RPG and added a bounty of new features to enhance your farming pleasure. Unsurprisingly though, the basic premise of the game has remained pretty much unchanged since the first *Harvest Moon* title graced the SNES in 1997. In that, it was down to you to manage your parents' rather run-down farm for two and a half years while they were away; in that time you'd plant crops, raise and feed various animals and even attempt to pick a future wife from one of five possible candidates. Each potential partner had her own preferences and many an hour would be spent either working out the right gifts to give to her, or showing off your fancy footwork at local festivals.

Despite its quirkiness, *Harvest Moon* proved extremely popular, with later games appearing on the Game Boy, Game Boy Color, N64, PlayStation and PS2. Unfortunately however, only the Game Boy and PSX games ever made it to Europe – although Ubi Soft is now rectifying this by publishing *A Wonderful Life* for the GameCube and *Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town* for the Game Boy Advance.

With such a worthy pedigree to live up to, it comes as no surprise to learn that Natsume are pouring plenty of heart and soul into the latest instalment and have even likened *A Wonderful Life* to the kind of game that Nintendo itself would release as a first-party product. Bold words indeed, although it does look like Natsume may actually be able to achieve these lofty goals. Everything about *A Wonderful Life* is bigger and better than all the previous instalments.

The biggest difference over its predecessors is that you'll now be able to have your offspring help you on the farm. Other additions include a brand new chapter system, plenty of new animals to raise and look after and the ability to create new hybrid crops by modifying existing ones – a little bit of GM inspiration, perhaps? One of the problems gamers initially found with the series was the fact that each game day would only last for a specific amount of time before moving on to the next, but Free Play mode will now enable you to weed, rake and generally plough away to your heart's content.

Even better, there's also the opportunity to connect your GameCube to a GBA and use the link-up option; although Natsume is keeping the specifics a secret, we're expecting it to allow you to unlock new events and find new items to enhance your farming exploits. Let's hope that the latest instalment of *Harvest Moon* is enough to convince gamers that farm life is actually fun and not just long days of toil and misery. Although there's always the insurance…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: Natsume
RELEASE: October '03 (Japan: July, US: September)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

■ Natsume's RPG sees you toiling under the hot sun, chasing after girls and raising a house full of kids. Surely that can't be fun?

FRUIT OF YOUR LOINS

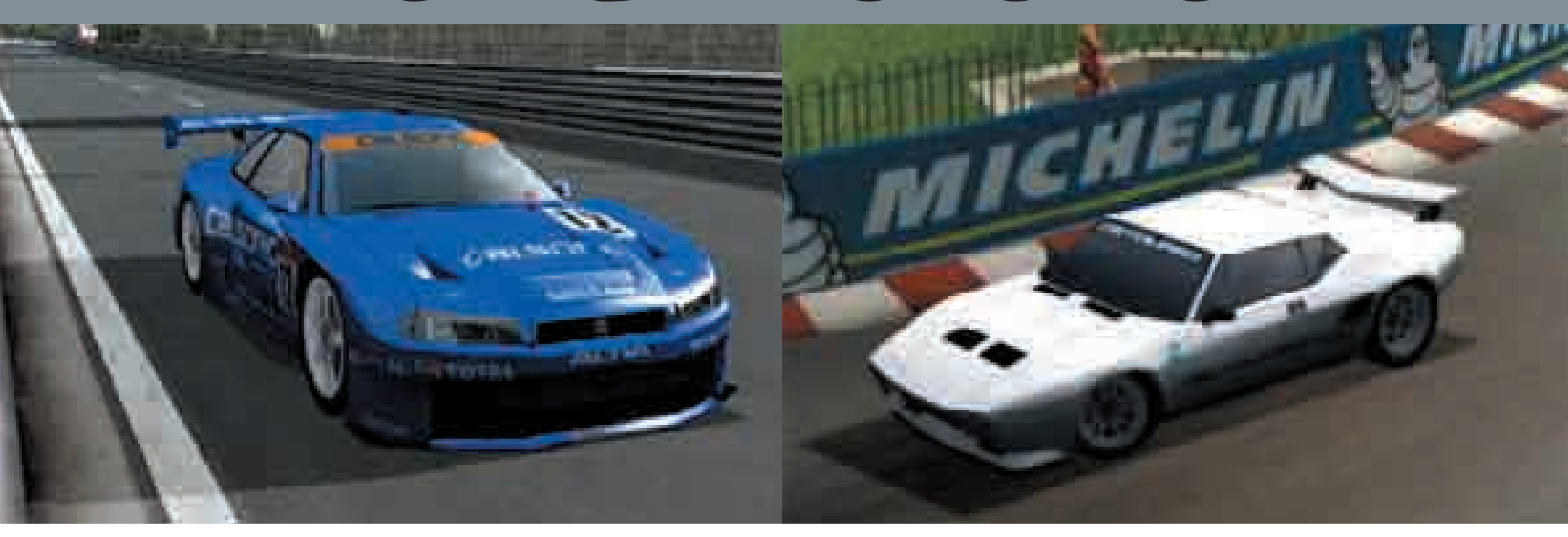
Unlike the previous *Harvest Moon* games that saw your farming career spanning only a short period, *A Wonderful Life* gives you 30 years to play around with. What makes this aspect so interesting is that your character ages the longer you play. Starting as a young man, you'll soon reach adulthood and eventually raise a child or two. Once they're old enough, they can help you out with the chores that need doing on your hopefully bustling farm. It's a shame the game's limit is set at 30 years, as the prospect of growing old gracefully while your children toil in the fields all day would have certainly brought a smile to our wizened faces.

"A WONDERFUL LIFE CAPTURES THE ESSENCE OF THE POPULAR FRANCHISE WHILE HARNESSING THE GAMECUBE'S POWER"



■ Ah, the friendly local tavern – a chance to drink, dance and, of course, pick up a woman. Be careful though, as you'll need more than just a white wine spritzer to impress these girls.

R: RACING EVOLUTION



RIDGE RACER RETURNS WITH A FRESH LICK OF PAINT AND SOME NEW GAMEPLAY MODES

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2/Xbox/GC
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Namco
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: TBC

■ *Ridge Racer* meets *Gran Turismo*, as the classic arcade racer gets a selection of licensed cars, new racing styles, and a more realistic look.

PS2 **Not to be confused with Infogrames' *Racing Evoluzione* on Xbox, Namco's *R: Racing Evolution* is the next instalment in the ten-year-old *Ridge Racer* series.** Having played a major role in the successful launch of the PlayStation in Japan, the first *Ridge Racer* game featured just one simple track with a choice of two routes. Of course, no-one complained about the lack of content at the time – most gamers were just pleased that such a prolific arcade hit had made it to a home console in what seemed to be a perfect coin-op conversion.

Looking back at it now, it's easy to see that the game was nowhere near arcade-perfect, though it was certainly an impressive piece of programming – especially seeing as the entire game was transferred into the PSone's meagre two megabytes of memory in a single load. Sadly, despite remaining popular with its core audience, the various follow-ups failed to set the world alight in the way that the original had, and by the time *Ridge Racer V* was released on PS2, the questionable dynamics and synthetic car handling were starting to look hideously out of date.

It's now been three years since *Ridge Racer V* launched alongside the PS2 and a lot has changed during that time. We've witnessed the release of some decent racing simulations, such as *Gran Turismo 3* and *SEGA GT 2002*, while the likes of *Burnout 2* and *Quantum Redshift* create an adrenaline rush in the way that *Ridge Racer* did all those years ago. So where can Namco go from here? Has its once acclaimed series finally had its day?

Well, as you've probably guessed by the screenshots, Namco has taken a completely new direction with its first multi-format *Ridge Racer* game, though it's not really a route that the fans were expecting. With a selection of licensed cars and a choice of eight different racing styles, it seems that the developers have decided that a *Gran Turismo*-style racing simulation is the only way forward for the series. The game will be broken down into four basic gameplay modes – Arcade (which should retain a little of the heritage), Time Attack and Versus (which speak for themselves) as well as the new Racing Life mode, which is Namco's stylised answer to the simulation modes found in similar titles.

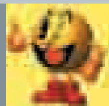
Of course, you have to ask whether fans of the series particularly want to play yet another *Gran Turismo* clone. Surely it would make more sense if Namco was to take inspiration from the likes of *Burnout* and create an exciting city-based racer with rush hour traffic and large-scale pile-ups? Besides, the fantasy cars featured in the previous games gave the Namco designers the opportunity to flex their creative muscle, whereas now their cars will be dictated by the limitations of real life.

However, it isn't just the gameplay that worries us about *R: Racing Evolution*. Judging by the first screenshots, it would appear that the visuals are distinctly average, certainly falling well short of the vibrancy we've come to expect from Namco. The early videos suggest that everything looks better in motion, but you still couldn't really describe the graphics as cutting edge. Perhaps this is because three versions of the game are being prepared simultaneously, or perhaps it's because the designers are spending too much time perfecting the car models. Either way, it would appear that Namco has plenty of work to do before the game launches at the end of the year. Let's just hope that's enough time to get it right.

YOU GO GIRL

Continuing the *Ridge Racer* trend for featuring Japanese cyber babes, Namco has unveiled two lovely new ladies for *R: Racing Evolution*. However, this time their inclusion will be far more integral than before; rather than simply mincing about at the start line and breaking the heels off their stilettoes in the FMV opening sequence, Namco's new polygonal protagonists (who have yet to be named) will actually be driving the cars in the new Racing Life mode. Similar in structure to the Story mode in *TOCA Race Driver*, Racing Life will focus on the lives of Namco's new leading ladies as they struggle to be the best at their sport. Expect a few cat fights in the pit lane.

> "NAMCO HAS PLENTY OF WORK TO DO BEFORE THE GAME IS OUT AT THE END OF THE YEAR"



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Although the name Namco has been associated with videogames since the Seventies, the company actually started out as Nakamura Manufacturing Ltd. in 1955. Based in Tokyo, the company initially built children's rides, and even collaborated with Disney during the Sixties, before changing its name to Namco in 1972.

HISTORY

- **RIDGE RACER** 1993 [Arcade]
- **PAC-MAN** 1981 [Arcade]
- **GALAXIAN** 1979 [Arcade]

■ A range of racing styles are set to be included, including circuit, drag racing and, of course, rally driving.

■ Is it *Ridge Racer* or *Gran Turismo*? Judging by the screenshots it would appear that even Namco doesn't know the answer.

"IT SEEMS THAT THE DEVELOPERS HAVE DECIDED THAT A GRAN TURISMO-STYLE RACING SIMULATION IS THE ONLY WAY FORWARD FOR THE SERIES"

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

RIDGE RACER REVOLUTION OR EVOLUTION?

RIDGE RACER + GRAN TURISMO - CARS & TRACKS = R: RACING EVOLUTION

VIRTUAL ON MARZ

SEGA'S GIANT ROBOTS MAKE A CONSOLE COMEBACK



Virtual On Marz is the latest in a long-running series, but can it break into the Western market?

At last year's Tokyo Game Show, SEGA revealed that the next *Virtual On* game would be an exclusive PlayStation2 release. Moreover, it specified that there would be no TwinStick peripheral supplied with the game. Naturally, many a discerning eyebrow was raised at this. How could such a staunch arcade title survive the conversion to a sit-down mission-based game – especially without the original control interface?

Entitled *Virtual On Marz*, the game is set around the Marz Virtuaroid (VR) battalion. With a far stronger emphasis on the series' historically intricate and complex narrative, this is very much a new direction for *Virtual On*; a direction for which many fans felt the series would be unsuited. While still unfinished, it's clear that *Virtual On Marz* is a solid game and not the complete travesty that many were expecting. The unique vector-based dash attacks and intuitive close combat are present and correct, but it's important to clarify at this point that this is essentially a streamlined port of *Virtual On Force* – and *Force* is one of the weakest entries in the *Virtual On* canon. What's more, the shift from four high-powered Hikari boards to the PlayStation2 doesn't appear to have done *Virtual On Marz* many graphical favours.

Thankfully, the lack of TwinSticks isn't a complete disaster; the various pad set-ups (including two that mimic the TwinSticks) are all fairly serviceable. Admittedly, much of the more advanced close combat is unnecessarily tricky, but Hitmaker's gamble at making the controls more inclusive has certainly paid off. Nevertheless, the sluggish handling from *Virtual On Force* is present here – many new players may find the game's unresponsiveness frustrating.

All things considered, hard-core fans of the series may feel let down if *Virtual On Marz* remains as it is now. A mission-based *Virtual On* game runs counter to the series' arcade roots, where human Versus is what made the franchise so vibrantly energetic (in Japan at least). Admittedly, there is plenty for the fans – the re-appearance of Z-Gradt and a huge selection of playable VR's are most appreciated – but this is set to be a game for the uninitiated. It will be very interesting to see how *Virtual On Marz* is received in Japan, where the series has its largest fanbase.

> "WITH A FAR STRONGER EMPHASIS ON THE SERIES' COMPLEX NARRATIVE, THIS IS A NEW DIRECTION FOR VIRTUAL ON"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Hitmaker
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-2

Can this mech-fest appeal to newcomers and fans alike?



Find a friend and then blow up his mech. Into pieces. Lots of little pieces.

The PS2's graphics won't be up to that of the arcade instalments.


eMag

STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE

NINTENDO HAS NOTHING TO FEAR – THE FORCE IS A POWERFUL ALLY INDEED

***Jedi Knight* good. *Obi Wan* bad. *Rogue Squadron* good. *Jedi Power Battles* bad.** Through the years *Star Wars* titles have endured a rough time, with the rollercoaster of licensed games hitting extreme highs and lows during a stream of mostly mediocre efforts. Quite how the same series can spawn the seminal *X-Wing/TIE Fighter* games and the disgusting *Bounty Hunter* is beyond us, but if there's one thing we've learned it's that games based on the original trilogy tend to fare best (*Episode I Racer* excluded, naturally). So it should come as no surprise that *Rebel Strike* draws inspiration from the trio of classics. Once again, we'll be treated to a blend of movie re-creations and new stories within familiar settings, and you'll still be able to attack the Death Star, but with one major improvement – this time, you can bring along a friend.

Impressively, the already respectable engine from the previous game has been rebuilt to now allow nearly double the amount of craft to be displayed at any given time. Admittedly, logic would dictate this to be essential in the integration of a two-player option but even in Solo mode, LucasArts seems determined to make the player feel the benefits of the technical overhaul – screens fill with craft in a flash and epic battles can ensue. It's not all for show, though – thanks to this new-found power, the dense jungle landscapes and arctic peaks can be rendered in much more detail to allow for much closer inspection. How so? Let's just say you won't be confined to the cockpit on this mission…

Perhaps the most obvious new feature is the on-foot element, expanding the ability to change craft mid-mission from the last game into the ability to run around until you find one you like. Some sections of missions will also need to be undertaken *sans* transport – these see your protagonist taking to the halls, blaster in hand, for some inter-dogfight relief. Though these do feel a little suspect at the moment, there's plenty of time for this to be addressed. These on-foot segments break up the constant space flight wonderfully, brilliantly linking sections together (using a Lightsaber to break into an AT-AT was a highlight of E3 for some), but it does seem that relying on them as standalone sections could be something of a mistake. Better still, you'll be able to hop into ground vehicles or procure Speeder Bikes for accelerated ground travel – tackling your given tasks is made a lot more personal thanks to this added freedom.

The main thing to note is that *Rebel Strike* does not disappoint. In the same way we were impressed with *Rogue Leader* at launch, we find ourselves equally eager for Factor 5's second cubic disturbance in the Force. It's plain to see that the game is not, and will not be, without its pitfalls, but in terms of a faithful and enjoyable recreation of one of the world's best-loved sci-fi universes, the series still marches on triumphantly. With all the bonuses and replay incentives players have come to expect from the *Rogue Squadron* games, there's no shortage of material to keep you occupied. Taking into account the addition of nearly 20 extra co-op missions courtesy of *Rogue Leader* and the advancement of the already superb rewards system, we can't see many gamers ever unlocking everything.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: LucasArts
RELEASE: Q4
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-2

Rogue Squadron III sets new standards for the popular *Star Wars* series in terms of both how it looks and plays.

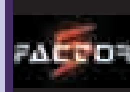
THAT'S NO MOON…

The most notable improvement over the previous games must be the addition of several split-screen multiplayer modes. On top of co-operative and versus play with all the new levels, popular gamers will welcome the inclusion of co-operative variants of every level from *Rogue Leader*. The potential here is vast – take an X-Wing to protect a friend's Y-Wing bombing run, or take two mounted turrets to double your chances of survival, or take all-new dogfights and multiplayer challenges… We don't yet know how far the new missions will take this aspect of the game, but we're expecting some unique challenges.

"SOME SECTIONS SEE YOU ON FOOT, BLASTER IN HAND, FOR SOME INTER-DOGFIGHT RELIEF"



The sense of speed here is excellent, requiring lightning reactions to avoid obstacles and take out those that would stand in your way.



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Founded in 1987 in Germany, it didn't take long for Factor 5 to forge ties with Nintendo and LucasArts and move its offices to California. Best known for its recent and impressive *Star Wars* titles, the firm's history stretches back to the 16-bit era.

HISTORY

- **PILOTWINGS** 2004 [GameCube]
- **SWRSII: ROGUE LEADER** 2002 [GameCube]
- **STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON 3D** 1998 [N64]

■ Take to the halls dressed as a Storm Trooper. Sound familiar? Come to think of it, he does look a little short…

■ Of all the rides you could have chosen, you had to pick the only one that isn't made of metal. Poor choice.

■ Yes, you can enlist the help of Ewoks on Endor. Yes, you can shoot them if you want as well. Just don't expect to finish the mission…

> "THE GAME FEATURES A COMPREHENSIVE REWARD SYSTEM ALLOWING PLAYERS TO UNLOCK FEATURES INCLUDING EXTRA MISSIONS, VEHICLES, AND LOCATIONS"
>
> *LUCASARTS PRESS RELEASE*

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER CLONE…

SWRSII: ROGUE LEADER + GRAND THEFT AUTO 3 + MULTIPLAYER = SWRSIII: REBEL STRIKE


eMag

MAFIA: THE CITY OF LOST HEAVEN



Think *GTA* mixed with the 'cool' attitude of the *Hitman* series and you'll have an idea of what *Mafia* is like.

GO OUT AND GET YOURSELF MADE, KID…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2/Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Take 2 Interactive
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

It's *Grand Theft Auto* for the more refined criminal – just as violent, but more realistic and impressive-looking.

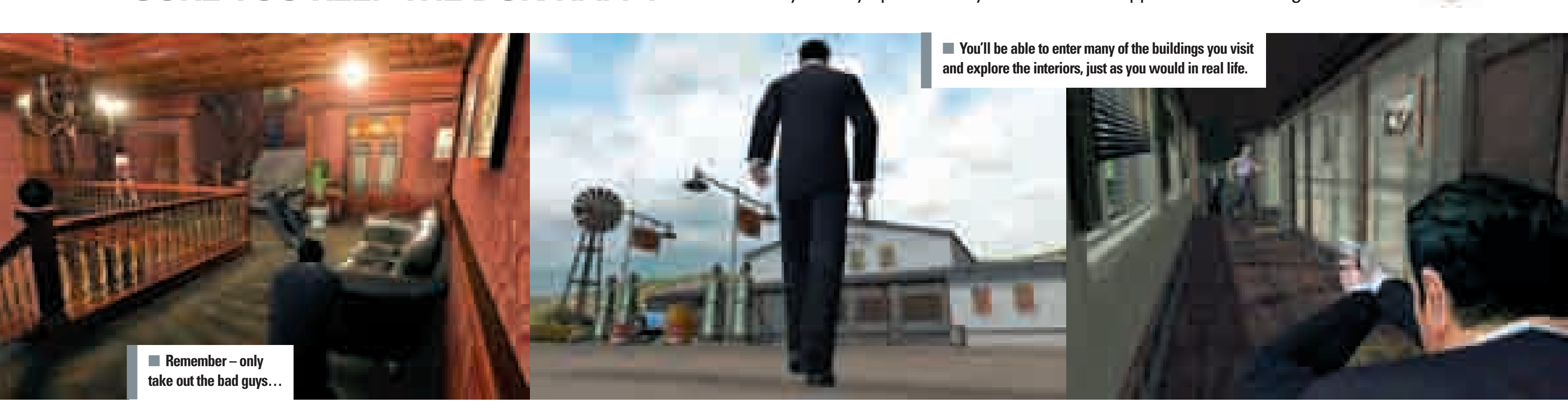
PS2 **Think you're refined, do you?** Cultured? Maybe even a bit gentlemanly or ladylike? Then you're probably the kind of gamer that thinks the blasé arcade-styled violence of *Grand Theft Auto* is beneath you, but still feels the need to pop a cap in the occasional ass every so often. Well, have no fear because in only a few months, Take 2 could very well have what you're looking for in the form of *Mafia: The City Of Lost Heaven*. Yes, so on paper it might sound a lot like *GTA* and is even being released by the people who spawned Rockstar Games… but it's completely different. Honest.

"IT'S ALL ABOUT KEEPING YOURSELF ALIVE AND MAKING SURE YOU KEEP THE DON HAPPY"

Admittedly, those of you fluent in the world of PC gaming will no doubt have caught onto the fact that *Mafia* isn't exactly a new title. Originally out on the PC last year, the game was in development for the best part of three years. Still, that hasn't stopped Take 2 from bringing a fairly successful game to a much wider audience with, thanks to the time between the PC and console releases, some suitably polished improvements to the visuals.

On the game front, things are pretty much as they were in the PC version – no bad thing, seeing as it received rave reviews across the board from numerous magazines. Set in Thirties America and placing an emphasis firmly on the underworld shenanigans of the Mafia at the time (as the title suggests), it's your job to work your way up from lowly-but-well-dressed henchman to the dizzy heights of being made. Of course, if you ever want to make it in the world of organised crime, you'll need to complete tasks set by Don Salieri. With 20 missions available (and plenty of sub-quests on offer to the more resourceful Mafiosa among you) across a variety of different jobs such as getaway driver, enforcer and even hitman, you'll certainly get a taste for the life as you plough through the game.

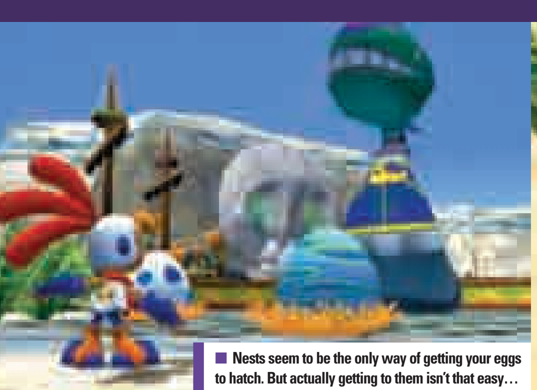
While the ability to use a veritable armoury of weapons and drive over 60 different vehicles around a 12-square-mile expanse of city might set *GTA*-toned alarm bells ringing in your head, rest assured that *Mafia* is a much more realistic and atmospheric experience. Expect a hands-on preview when code appears in the coming months.



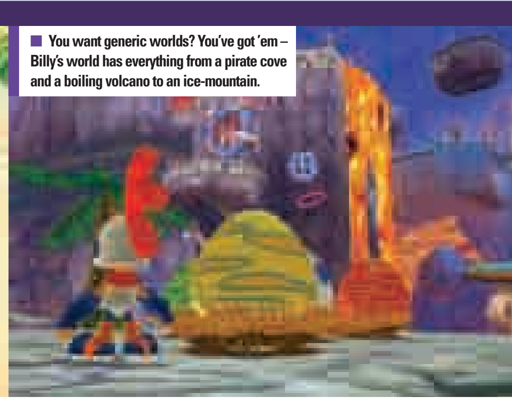
You'll be able to enter many of the buildings you visit and explore the interiors, just as you would in real life.

Remember – only take out the bad guys…

BILLY HATCHER AND THE GIANT EGG


Nests seem to be the only way of getting your eggs to hatch. But actually getting to them isn't that easy…




You want generic worlds? You've got 'em – Billy's world has everything from a pirate cove and a boiling volcano to an ice-mountain.

GIANT ROOSTER-BOYS, EVIL KINGS AND MAGICAL EGGS – A SOFT-BOILED IDEA FOR A GAME?

Call us old-fashioned, but we're sure that dressing in a rooster outfit and rolling huge eggs over anything that gets in your way is the kind of behaviour that would get you locked up in a loony bin if you weren't careful. Of course, once you realise that the premise behind SEGA's upcoming game *Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg* comes from the mind of Yuji Naka (the man responsible for creating *that* hedgehog), it all becomes a little clearer. Billy Hatcher's not crazy, he's just Japanese. Figures, really.

Appearing as Sonic Team's first new platform character since the days of the Saturn (and running on an enhanced version of the *Sonic Adventure 2 Battle* engine, according to Naka-san himself), Billy Hatcher is a boy with a penchant for eggs. Lucky, then, that the need to defeat an evil king, intent on ruling the land with the power of eternal night, gives Billy the chance to don a giant rooster suit and push massive eggs around, before hatching them to solve all manner of head-scratching puzzles. By exploring the massive carnival-esque worlds (the number of which has yet to be confirmed), you'll find many different eggs. Not only can you roll them around and throw them to flatten enemies but by checking out the problems ahead, you can work out which eggs you'll need to hatch in order to progress.

Hatching is a very important part of Billy's quest so you'll have to take good care of your eggs, making sure you don't break them and scramble (sorry) your chances of success. Find an egg and you can nurture it in specific locations until it hatches, producing one of many unique creatures with specific abilities. These can then be used to overcome numerous obstacles or controlled independently according to the situation – however, at the time of going to press, Sonic Team is keeping precise details on how this works firmly under its hat.

Having seen *Billy Hatcher* in action, it's easy to see the similarities between it and Sonic's original GameCube outing. However, it also has enough unique touches, innovation and smart animation to make it look like a game worth your attention, particularly when you consider that it'll also feature a number of multiplayer options as well as an expansive single-player experience.

Despite the odd hiccup with games like *Sonic Adventure DX*, Sonic Team's reputation is second-to-none; a fact that gives us more than enough faith that *Billy Hatcher* could end up being the sleeper hit of the year.

> "A DIZZYING BLEND OF FAST ACTION AND HYPNOTIC GAMEPLAY, THIS IS THE NEXT BIG THING FROM THE LEGENDARY SONIC TEAM"
>
> *MIKE FISCHER, VP MARKETING, SEGA OF AMERICA*

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-4

The creators of *Sonic* go back to the drawing board and come up with the embodiment of exciting gameplay – a kid in a rooster suit.


A cheery lad with the kind of optimism you'd expect from a Japanese game character he might be, but he's still dressed as a giant rooster. Weirdo.


eMag

GRADIUS V



"THE LATEST INSTALMENT IN THE SERIES FEATURES THE CLASSIC GRADIUS ACTION GAMEPLAY WITH ALL NEW FEATURES"
KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

■ As expected, the pyrotechnic displays that accompany more powerful weapons and enemies can be pretty impressive.

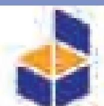
VIDEOGAMES MATHS
EIGHTEEN YEARS OF EVOLUTION

GRADIUS + IKARUGA + BIG GUNS = GRADIUS V

■ The weapon upgrade system will be instantly recognisable to anyone with even a vague knowledge of shooters.



GRADIUS V
PLAYSTATION2



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Founded in 1992, Treasure's catalogue must stand as one of the most eclectic in gaming, ranging from gaming gems like *Ikaruga* and *Gunstar Heroes* to the quirky likes of *Freak Out*. The highlights are easily its shooters, many of which rate among the best in their genres.

HISTORY

■ **WARIO WORLD** 2003 [GameCube]
■ **BANGAI-O** 2000 [Dreamcast]
■ **GUNSTAR HEROES** 1993 [Mega Drive]

ANOTHER CLASSIC SERIES GETS THE 21ST CENTURY TREATMENT

PS2 **You can bombard us with substandard licensed cash-ins, subject us to bullet-time abuse and even invent new genres like the 'digital parlour game' to keep us intrigued, but at the end of the day there can be no substitute for good old-fashioned gameplay.** We've seen a welcome return to this school of thinking lately – games like *Ikaruga*, *Mr Driller* and *Contra: Shattered Soldier* stand out on merit of their sheer simplicity and focus. While there's certainly nothing wrong with a little eye candy (*Ikaruga*, for example, manages to impress both visually and structurally), it can often become distracting. With the 'back to basics' feeling that seems to be growing in popularity, it's only fair that the games that were around in the heyday of their genre get a chance to scrub up and go all modern on us. *Contra*'s done it, *Metal Slug* never left and *R-Type* is coming soon, but for now, we're most interested in what Treasure is doing with the *Gradius* series.

First, and most noticeably, the facelift fairy has clearly visited *Gradius*, and the new look is significantly more appealing than most of the 'neon orgy' shooters that make up much of the competition. We've only so far sampled the game's single-player action (it's not even confirmed yet whether more participants will be welcomed) but we were impressed with the fact that despite being a polygon-based affair, it manages to retain the feel of its predecessors. Even in the early stages, bosses are as over the top and impressive as ever – you can expect to be facing enemies many times the size of the play area as you blast through the game's seven huge levels. The swirling backgrounds do their bit in creating the illusion of 3D wonderfully – while gameplay is confined firmly to x and y, the levels often use z-axis effects and movements to give the impression of a truly 3D experience.

One area that does need a little work at present is the game balance – while it could have been specially toughened for the demo version, it's all too easy to become totally stuck simply for having lost power-ups early on. While this might be acceptable deeper into the game, it's certainly not the best introduction and hopefully the finished game will be not so much easier as fairer – progress should be possible with a minimum of power-ups, albeit harder than usual. The difficulty isn't helped by confusing enemy patterns; while we expect some denser waves of opponents at times, it verges on the ridiculous when the screen simply fills with enemies and you're expected to clean up the lot. Action-packed it may be, but these full-on sections aren't as refined or enjoyable as they need to be just yet.

Fortunately, no matter what changes cosmetically and structurally, this is obviously *Gradius*. The weapon system may have been revamped slightly (all of the weapons don't seem to be in place in the preview version although 12 different ship power-ups are promised) and all the glorious 3D trickery can't hide the fact that this is a 2D game. It needs a little work in places but in terms of faithfulness and aesthetics, the groundwork is done and done well. We'll be keeping a close eye on the progress of *Gradius V* – with a little polish, this could be up there with the greats and prove an essential purchase at the end of the year.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Treasure
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1

■ Old school principles and gameplay meet next-gen visuals in an update of one of the best-loved series of shooters ever.

KEEP YOUR OPTIONS OPEN

The Option weapon system is arguably the most famous part of the *Gradius* series. Unsurprisingly, the core system is unchanged here, but it has had some additions. New Option controls allow you to toggle between multiple set-ups at the touch of a button, allowing for the right configuration to be used in the correct situation. This brings extra depth and customisation that should add to the replay value (which is so important in this genre). To this end, each level has a fair height to it, allowing for some vertical exploration and path selection, meaning that there'll be plenty of routes through each stage.

"LEVELS OFTEN USE Z-AXIS EFFECTS AND MOVEMENTS TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF A TRULY 3D EXPERIENCE"



■ Dodge spinning lasers, avoid bullets, shoot enemies – multitasking is a necessity as in most shooters.

■ You won't be confronted by obstacles much larger than these in any game. They move too, as if they weren't hard enough to avoid…

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL



The free-roaming concept allows players to wander from the story-driven track and mingle with the strange selection of locals.

UBI SOFT PROVES THAT ORIGINALITY ISN'T DEAD

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GC, PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Explore every nook and cranny of the bizarre world of Hyllis by land, air and sea.

"BG&E SPORTS A DIVERSE RANGE OF GAMEPLAY THAT MANAGES TO DEFY CATEGORISATION"

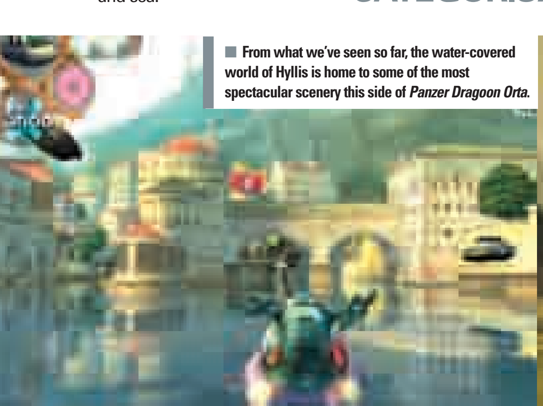
PS2 **It seems like almost every must-see title paraded at this year's E3 was either a sequel or the latest instalment in a successful franchise.** While the likes of *Halo 2, Metal Gear Solid 3* and *Half-Life 2* are more than worthy of the attention they received – and between them feature enough groundbreaking ideas to keep gamers happy – the distinct lack of fresh new titles, let alone novel gaming concepts, did leave us worried that originality was becoming a forgotten art.

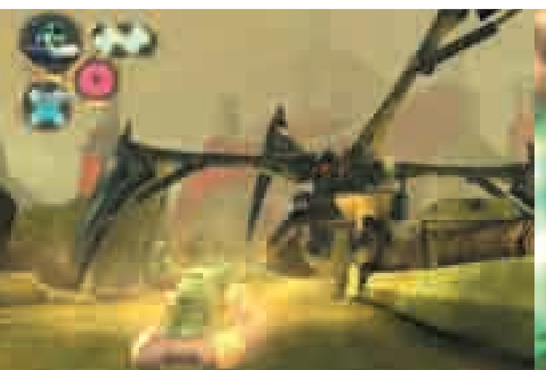
But it's refreshing to know there are still developers willing to create games that don't have a best-selling forerunner to guarantee that the money will roll in. One of this year's champions of originality is Michel Ancel, creator of the *Rayman* series and mastermind behind *Beyond Good & Evil*. Ancel's team have been letting their imaginations run wild for the last three years, and our first look at the fruit of their hard work left us very impressed.

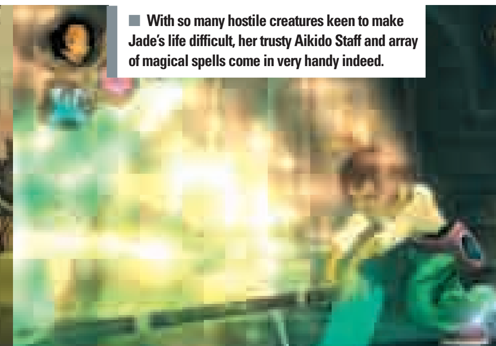
BG&E is a third-person adventure sporting a diverse range of gameplay that manages to defy categorisation. The story follows the investigative exploits of Jade – a particularly determined resident of the planet Hyllis – as she attempts to unravel the truth behind a suspected alien conspiracy. Exploration will be at the heart of the gaming experience as players are encouraged to roam free around the surreal gameworld, which has been stunningly recreated. Jade initially travels on foot or by hovercraft, but later a jet plane attachment will allow her access to even more of Hyllis' weird and wonderful delights.

Jade's major objective in all of this will be to photograph some of the more elusive creatures that inhabit the furthest flung corners of the planet. To assist her in this often perilous task are a number of bizarre-looking sidekicks, whose unique abilities can be employed by players to tackle those situations that prove beyond Jade's abilities.

With some intelligent depth to the puzzles, boundless potential for exploration by land, sea or air, and inspiring visuals bringing Hyllis to life magnificently, we've already got *BG&E* pencilled in on our Christmas list.


From what we've seen so far, the water-covered world of Hyllis is home to some of the most spectacular scenery this side of *Panzer Dragoon Orta*.




With so many hostile creatures keen to make Jade's life difficult, her trusty Aikido Staff and array of magical spells come in very handy indeed.


eMag

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

JUST HOW MUCH BETTER CAN RACING GAMES GET? WE'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT…

Microsoft's Xbox launch games were some of the strongest titles the current generation of consoles has seen. With *Halo*, *Dead Or Alive 3*, *Jet Set Radio Future*, *Amped* and the wonderful *Project Gotham Racing* available from day one, the system seemed to have something for everyone. However, while the first batch of titles hinted that the Xbox would be able to offer a gaming experience above and beyond that of its competitors, the months following the launch were disappointing to say the least. While the likes of Tecmo and Bizarre Creations had been preparing titles to coincide with the launch of the hardware, it appeared that no other developers were even close to releasing any other groundbreaking exclusive Xbox titles.

And so a games drought began – one that lasted for months, during which time only a handful of decent titles were released amidst a landslide of ropey PS2 conversions. In fact, it's debatable whether there have been any new games to rival *Halo* or *Project Gotham* even now. However, this autumn the next wave of Xbox titles is due to hit these shores and, going purely on what was shown at this year's E3, gamers can soon be expecting a flood of decent Xbox titles.

Microsoft's announcement that *Project Gotham Racing 2* was in development was great news for Xbox owners. Although initial details were sketchy, it was revealed that two new cities – Edinburgh and Hong Kong – were to be included (it was widely assumed that London, New York, San Francisco and Tokyo would remain from original game). However, Bizarre Creations has now confirmed that Barcelona, Florence, Chicago, Moscow and a selection of other locations will now feature, each shown in the sort of glorious detail that made the original so impressive. In fact, on viewing the game it appears that even more detail has gone into the scenery and cars this time round; roadside buildings are now virtually photo-realistic, the reflection-mapping techniques are even more refined, and a number of new weather conditions have been added. There's still work to be done before the game launches, of course, though it's already obvious that this is one of the most visually impressive Xbox games to date.

It's not just the visuals that are getting a makeover either – the car handling and Kudos Ranking system are being tweaked to perfection too. This time players are awarded additional Kudos points for sticking closely to the racing line and for keeping the car in pristine condition (the car models will once again show dents and abrasions when coming into contact with scenery and other cars). As before, points can also be earned for impressive slides and cornering, and skilled players will be rewarded with plenty of extras, including the new Enzo Ferrari, Porsche GT2 or Pontiac GTO, as well as a wide range of flashy paint jobs for each.

Predictably, Bizarre Creations isn't trying to reinvent the wheel with *PGR2* – it's merely attempting to build upon an already established and thoroughly enjoyable racing title. There's certainly no denying that this looks the part, and providing the finished product is as user-friendly and fun to play as its predecessor, Xbox owners are in for a real treat.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Bizarre Creations
RELEASE: Q4 '03 (Japan: TBA, US: Q4)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: TBA

PGR2 looks set to attract a huge audience, thanks to its fast-paced yet accessible gameplay.

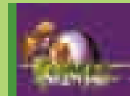
DRIVING LIVE

One of the most exciting features in *Project Gotham Racing 2* is Xbox Live support. Not only will it be possible to upload your high scores onto a worldwide leaderboard, but you'll also be able to download replays of other players' perfect laps so you can see what you should be doing. Best of all, the game will also support full online multiplayer street racing for Xbox owners, as well as regular console-to-console system links. It isn't known how many players will be able to race simultaneously, though we'd be surprised if it's more than four. But as long as there's a decent selection of cars and tracks, and the game remains fun, four-player action will be just fine.

"THIS IS GOING TO BE ONE OF THE MOST VISUALLY IMPRESSIVE XBOX GAMES TO DATE"



A range of cars will be included in the game, both new and old.



COMPANY PROFILE

Based in the North West of England, Bizarre Creations was initially called Raising Hell Software when it started up in 1987. Although it worked on a handful of C64 and Mega Drive titles, it wasn't until the release of *Formula 1* for PSone in 1996 that the company got any real recognition.

HISTORY

- **PROJECT GOTHAM RACING** 2002 [Xbox]
- **METROPOLIS STREET RACER** 2000 [Dreamcast]
- **FORMULA 1** 1996 [PSone]

The first thing that strikes you about *PGR2* is the quality of the texture mapping, both on the vehicles and the scenery.

It's clear from the graphics that Bizarre Creations has spent much of the last two years building libraries of photos and video footage.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FAST-PACED RACING ALL AROUND THE WORLD

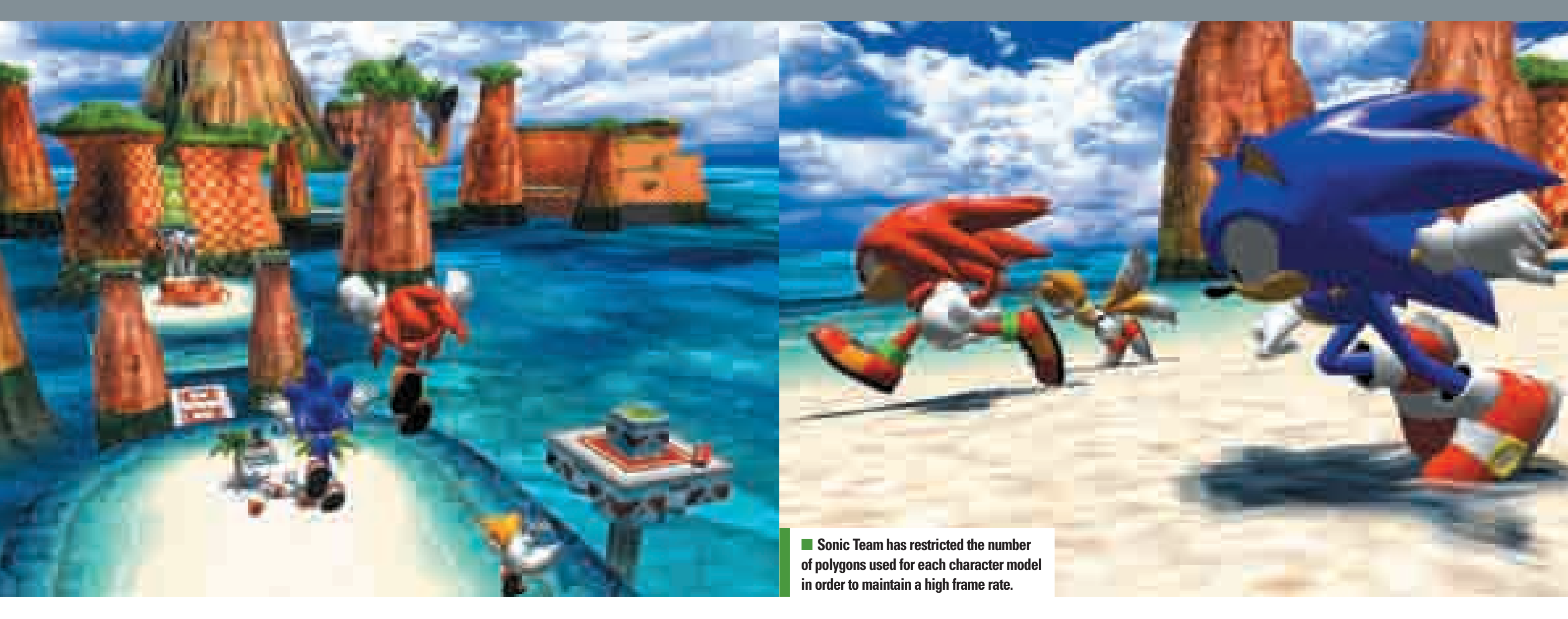
PGR + MORE PGR + XBOX LIVE = PGR2

The impression of the sun rising in Moscow is conveyed brilliantly, thanks to a number of impressive new lighting routines.

"IT'S A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE THE GOTHAM BRAND BIGGER, BETTER AND MORE EXCITING FOR RACING GAMERS AROUND THE GLOBE"

BIZARRE CREATIONS PRESS RELEASE

SONIC HEROES



Sonic Team has restricted the number of polygons used for each character model in order to maintain a high frame rate.

THREE CONSOLES, THREE CHARACTERS… DOES THAT MAKE IT NINE TIMES BETTER?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox/PS2/ GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: SEGA Sonic Team
RELEASE: Spring '04 (Japan: Winter '03, US: Spring '04)
GENRE: Platform
PLAYERS: 1

Classic *Sonic* platform gaming with a twist. Control three characters at once and use their unique abilities to get through the game.

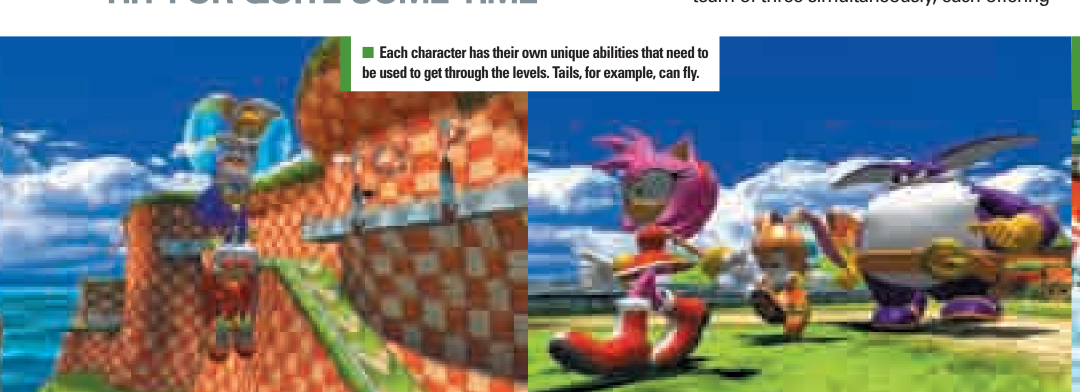
Since the demise of the Dreamcast, the only new *Sonic The Hedgehog* games to appear have been on Nintendo's GameCube, and all have been re-releases of old *Sonic* titles. Now, however, the spiky blue hero is about to make a welcome return in a brand new 3D adventure that looks set to feature all the best elements from the two *Sonic Adventure* games, as well as introducing its own clever ideas.

Being developed for all three current formats, you might think that *Sonic Heroes* would look distinctly average, though as you can see from the screenshots it's already looking rather special. The game runs at 60 frames per second, and while the playable versions we tested suffered from a little fluctuation, it's already clear that the finished game (which isn't due until next spring over here) will run as smoothly as anyone could hope for. Textures are also impressive, and thanks to some thoughtful visual design, the game manages to remain true to its roots while making the most of what the current generation of consoles can do (the chequered rock patterns are uncannily like those in *Sonic The Hedgehog* on the Mega Drive, for example).

But while the game is certainly looking pretty enough, it's the gameplay that really stands out from the rest of the *Sonic* series. You see, rather than controlling a single character, you actually control a team of three simultaneously, each offering their own unique abilities that are integral to getting through the levels. Sonic, for instance, is great for speeding along uncluttered pathways, while Knuckles can smash certain obstacles, and Tails can fly the team over pitfalls. The levels also feature numerous routes, each requiring differing amounts of each of the characters' skills. Some directions may be particularly well-suited to Sonic's speed, for example, while others may need Knuckles' brute force in order to be completed.

It'll be interesting to see if *Sonic Heroes* can put the *Sonic* series back in the limelight. Providing gamers can get used to the controls (remember, part of the appeal with Mega Drive *Sonic* was that just about anyone could play it), *Sonic Heroes* could be the first major hit for SEGA in quite some time.

> "DESPITE THE CONTROLS, THIS COULD BE SEGA'S FIRST MAJOR HIT FOR QUITE SOME TIME"



Each character has their own unique abilities that need to be used to get through the levels. Tails, for example, can fly.



The level designs look set to feature all the twists and turns that any *Sonic The Hedgehog* fan could wish for.


eMag

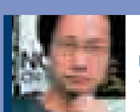
METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER



From hiding behind lockers to hiding behind trees, Snake is a man of many talents…

> "WE ARE PLEASED THAT KONAMI CONTINUES TO DEBUT NEW METAL GEAR SOLID PROPERTIES EXCLUSIVELY ON PLAYSTATION2"
>
> ANDREW HOUSE, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, SCEA

As stunning as it looks now, there's still a good few months of development time left before the planned release date.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Born on 24 August 1963 in Setagaya, Tokyo, Konami's Hideo Kojima is now one of the best known game developers in the world. Kojima-san began working at Konami way back in 1986, with his first game – *Metal Gear Solid* – launching on the MSX and NES just one year later.

HISTORY

- **MGS2: SUBSTANCE** 2003 [Multi]
- **METAL GEAR SOLID** 1998 [Multi]
- **METAL GEAR** 1987 [Multi]

ARE YOU READY FOR THE ULTIMATE BATTLE OF REPTILES? YES? THEN CHECK THIS OUT…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 2004 TBC (Japan/US: 2004 TBC)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Solid Snake returns for his third polygonal outing and he's looking better than ever. A new jungle setting means that this should offer a slightly different experience over the previous two games.

Everyone needs a change of scene once in a while, and for Solid Snake in *Metal Gear Solid 3*, a change of scene is just what he's getting. Gone are the harsh metal surfaces and man-made structures of the previous two games, instead being replaced with the lush foliage of the deepest jungle. Amazingly, despite the complexities involved with creating such an organic environment, Hideo Kojima and his team have developed a mightily impressive graphics engine – especially considering that there's still a good nine months to go before the game launches.

Already, the jungle looks surprisingly full of branches and shrubs, and though other developers have attempted to create such scenes in the past, most of their games have suffered from cardboard cut-out syndrome, whereby much of the scenery is flat. In contrast, the environments in *MGS3* have been arduously crafted with individual blades of grass and perfect textures that appear crisp and sharp without being overly detailed. The game also uses shadow casting which, when combined with the sunlight that glares through the canopy in golden rays, is the icing on this polygonal cake.

Breathtaking visuals aside, specific gameplay features have yet to be unveiled, though it's fairly safe to assume that this won't be that far removed from *MGS2*. Videos of the game in motion show Snake hiding behind trees and rocks in much the same way that he did with walls and lockers in the previous two games, while sneaking up on soldiers through the long grass is reminiscent of crawling under tables and through vents, as before. However, there are a few new features that the tall trees and undulating terrain will provide…

As in many other 3D adventure games, some of the trees in the *MGS3* jungle have obvious vine textures that grow up the trunks to the topmost branches. Whenever Snake comes across these, he can climb a good 20 or 30 feet above the jungle floor, giving him vantage points from which enemy soldiers can be shot at. The early footage hints that it will be possible to shimmy along branches above pathways then hang there with one hand and shoot with the other. It's also highly likely that certain areas will feature routes through the treetops that can be used to bypass guards without them noticing you're there. And on the subject of the guards – it's already clear that Konami has spent a great deal of time perfecting the animation. Just watching the troops making their way through the jungle is a sight to behold.

Of course, the big question is how much time will be spent actually playing the game in relation to watching the cut-scenes. No-one could deny that story and plot development has always been an integral part of the *Metal Gear* games, though we couldn't help feeling that the ratio of gameplay to footage went beyond what is acceptable in *MGS2*. Providing that Konami gets the balance right with *MGS3* and remembers that, despite its story-led nature, this is a videogame, everything looks set for this to be the first PS2 killer app for 2004. With some excellent visuals and a sweeping musical score, can the gameplay match the standard of the presentation?

PS2 EXCLUSIVE?

After disappointing sales of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance* on Xbox (which probably had more to do with the lacklustre conversion than anything else), Sony has again managed to secure the *Metal Gear* series as a PS2 exclusive. However, such deals usually only last for a limited period and while the game will initially launch on Sony's console, we wouldn't be surprised if an Xbox version follows later. *MGS3* is essentially using an upgraded version of the *MGS2* graphics engine, and seeing as how the code has already been ported to Xbox, it would be relatively easy for Konami to translate the new game across. Such a thing wouldn't cost that much, so the company wouldn't need to sell too many copies before making a profit.

"METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER LOOKS SET TO BE THE FIRST PS2 KILLER APP FOR 2004"



■ As you'd expect, stealth plays a big role in *MGS3*. Get spotted, however, and you can always use your gun.

■ If a man does martial arts in a forest and there's no-one around to hear it, does he make a sound?

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

AFTER NEARLY SEVEN YEARS, SQUARE ENIX'S CLASSIC RPG SERIES FINALLY RETURNS HOME

DETAILS
FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: Game Designers Studios
RELEASE: December '03 (Japan: 17 July)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ This is a welcome addition to the 'Cube's rather barren collection of RPG titles and is another exciting addition to the classic series.

Partnerships can be funny old things, with even the most solid-looking relationships failing to stand the test of time. Take Square and Nintendo for example; back in the heyday of the SNES, Square produced a series of stunning RPGs for Nintendo's console. *The Secret Of Mana*, *Chrono Trigger* and *Super Mario RPG* (not to mention the *Final Fantasy* series) were a testament both to Square's prowess and its close ties with Nintendo. Sadly, with the advent of CD technology, Square decided cartridges were too restrictive and it dumped Nintendo for the lure of the PlayStation.

CHOOSE YOUR DESTINY

Before you start your quest you'll need to choose which races to play. There are four in total and a balanced choice is needed if you wish to do well. First up are the Yulk; tall, gangly beings who are skilled in magic with a vast repertoire of spells. The Selkies are thieves whose dishonourable job leaves them scorned by other classes, while the Clavatte are peaceful sorts, though not afraid to fight for a worthy cause. Finally, there are the overly-cute Lilties, who are merchants by trade. It's a tough choice, but a necessary one.

> "CRYSTAL CHRONICLES HAS AN ENCHANTING MIX OF FANTASTIC VISUALS AND EXCITING MULTIPLAYER GAMEPLAY"

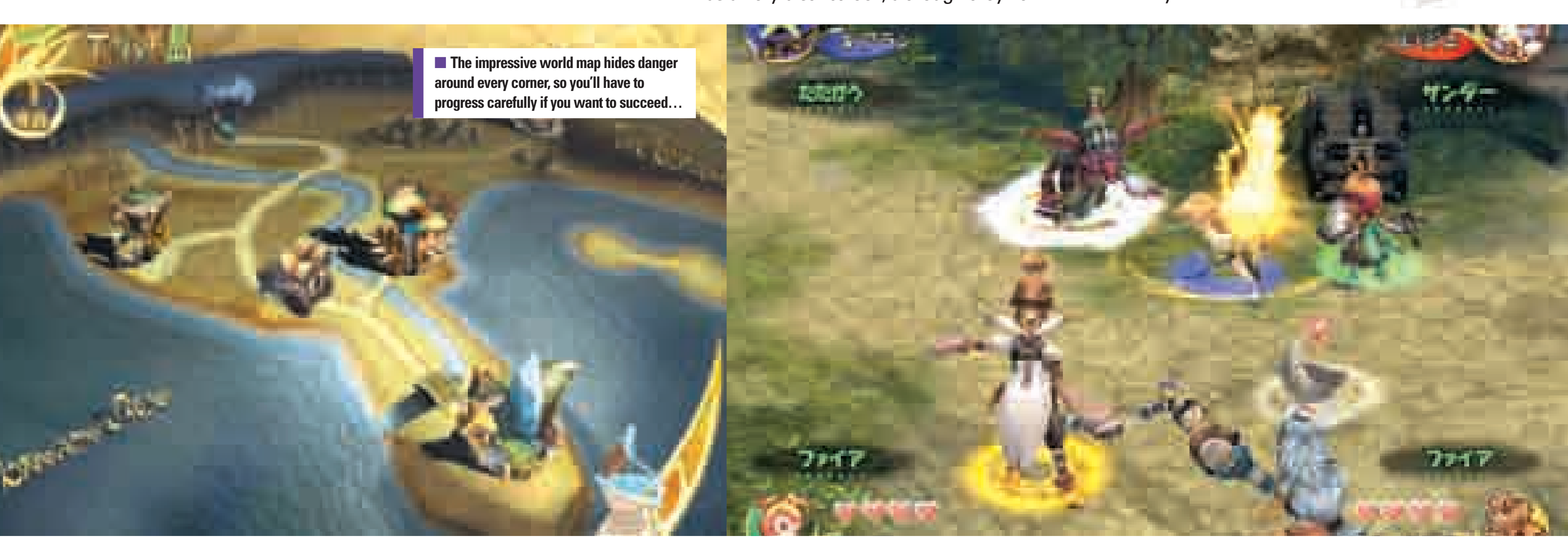
Now, however, after much negotiation between Square and Nintendo, Game Designers Studios has been created with the sole purpose of enabling GameCube owners to enjoy the halcyon days of the SNES. *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* is the first title from the studio and, so far, it's looking very special indeed.

No RPG would be complete without an absorbing story and *Crystal Chronicles* is no exception. In a land plagued by constant disease, Crystals have become an important source of protection; known for their healing powers, the Crystals emit a light that enables the villages to keep the deadly illness at bay. Unfortunately, each Crystal's power will only last for so long and they need to be re-energised with rare Mirula Droplets so that they can protect the villages for another year. That's where you come in – with your village's Crystal on the verge of collapse, it's down to you and three other heroes (see 'Choose your destiny') to leave the safety of your home and seek out those elusive droplets…

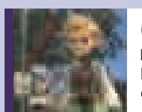
Visually, this is a world apart from the gritty realism of the current *Final Fantasy* games and instead offers an environment rich in organic beauty. Locations are many and varied, and all are filled with some wonderful lighting effects, impressive texturing and an array of ferocious enemies. Each of the four playable races has a very distinct look, although they've all been created by one of the *Final Fantasy IX* designers to ensure that they will at least share some similarities with other, more established, *Final Fantasy* characters.

Most significantly, the combat system has been revamped and won't feature the turn-based battle system that has served the rest of the series so well. Instead, combat takes place in real-time, with hit points being represented by hearts, and commands displayed via on-screen controller buttons. Characters are also able to carry items above their heads and one party member will always have to carry the Crystal Cage that's needed to catch Mirula droplets; don't worry though – all items can be dropped whenever you need to fight.

The GBA-to-GC connectivity will be used too. You can use a GBA as a surrogate controller, with its screen letting you read character stats and control the game's many impressive-looking spells. It's the team aspect, though, which is proving to be the most appetising prospect here – there hasn't been a multiplayer console RPG since *Secret Of Mana*, so it's no surprise that we're on tenterhooks at the thought of being able to fight together for the greater good. Looking like a suitable addition to the GameCube RPG canon, *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* is shaping up to be a very desirable title.



■ The impressive world map hides danger around every corner, so you'll have to progress carefully if you want to succeed…



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Game Designers Studios is a new studio that has been specifically created to develop new games for the Nintendo GameCube and Game Boy Advance. Funded by Nintendo, the studio mostly consists of ex-Square employees and is headed by Akitoshi Kawazy, the producer of *Legend Of Mana*.

HISTORY

■ *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* is the first product to be developed by Game Designers Studios

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

EXPLORING THE LAND OF FINAL FANTASY

SECRET OF MANA + FOUR SWORDS - LINK = FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

"THE FINAL FANTASY FRANCHISE IS ONE OF THE MOST RENOWNED AND REVERED SERIES IN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT"

PETER MACDOUGALL, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT MARKETING, NINTENDO OF AMERICA

■ It may look impressive but its power only lasts for so long – better start looking for those droplets…



■ *Crystal Chronicles* features superb looking graphics and impressive special effects… oh, and some bloody big monsters too.



SWORD OF MANA



■ They may look cute, but these Rabites pack quite a punch.

THE GODS OF GAMING HAVE FINALLY HEARD OUR PRAYERS…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Brownie Brown
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Q3 '03)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ A new RPG from Brownie Brown (a firm consisting of ex-Square staff). Just don't tell Square.

> "SWORD OF MANA LOOKS ABSOLUTELY BREATHTAKING AND IS A MORE THAN WELCOME RETURN TO THE CLASSIC SERIES OF OLD"

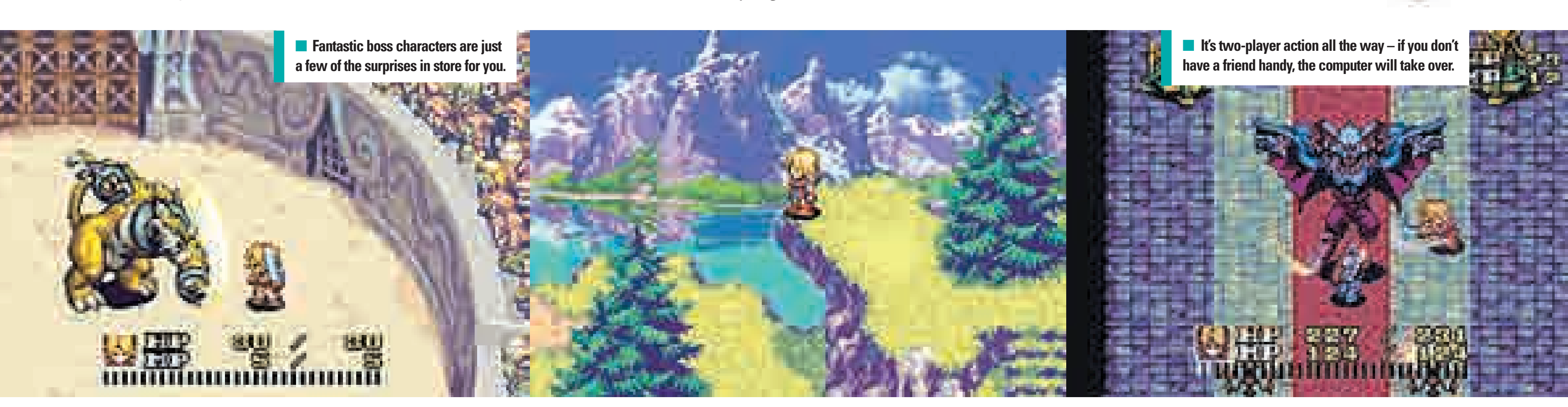
Game Boy Advance owners have had some great RPG titles, with classics like *Zelda: A Link To The Past* and *Golden Sun* being dusted down on a regular basis. And things are about to get even better, for not only is the sequel to the excellent *Golden Sun* just around the corner (and reviewed on page 112), but we're also being treated to the prequel of the SNES's excellent *Secret Of Mana*.

For anybody not up to speed, *Secret Of Mana* (along with *Chrono Trigger*) is widely regarded as one of the best RPGs ever created for Nintendo's 16-bit console. As well as a wonderful storyline, the unique addition of party members who would either follow you around and fight independently or become playable via a second or third player made it a must-have title – it was a great feature and has been sorely missed.

All that's about to change though, thanks to Brownie Brown's *Sword Of Mana*. The story sees us in familiar RPG territory; a young warrior has been trained as a gladiator in the slave pits of Grants and eventually meets up with a heroine who's on a journey to protect the mythical Mana Tree. What follows is pure handheld goodness as the heroes make their way through what looks set to be one of the most delightful GBA adventures so far.

Sword Of Mana initially impresses with its detailed backdrops, wonderful character animation and some suitably nasty-looking monsters. Early impressions also suggest that the AI has been improved over its 16-bit incarnation, with little of the mindless wandering or getting stuck on objects that affected *Secret Of Mana*. Combat is again in real-time and features a new modification to the charge-up attacks of old, meaning that it's now easier to use basic attacks without waiting for your meter to charge back up. *Sword Of Mana* also retains the unique ring inventory of the original game so that additional spells, equipment and items can be found quickly.

With the option for a second player to join the quest at any time, this could be RPG perfection. Let's just hope Nintendo confirms a release date soon. We want it so bad…



■ Fantastic boss characters are just a few of the surprises in store for you.

■ It's two-player action all the way – if you don't have a friend handy, the computer will take over.


eMag

SHOWCASE

EVEN MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

SYPHON FILTER: OMEGA STRAIN

TAKE THE STRAIN, GENTLEMEN

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Sony
Developer:	SCEA Foster City
Release:	Q4 '03
Genre:	Action
Players:	1 (1-4 Online)



In another example of the 'let's resurrect a decent old series' syndrome that appears to be rife in the industry at the moment, Sony is set to bring *Syphon Filter* up to date on the PS2. Admittedly, this is no bad thing – the original games were great fun, plus the slightly shoddy graphics are exactly what the power of the PS2 can fix. Still, with all the gameplay that made the PSone games great already taken as a given, it's the inclusion of four-player online co-operative play that will no doubt sweeten the deal for what could be one of Sony's more interesting games of the coming year. We'll keep our fingers crossed for this one.

GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

OOH, THAT'S GOTTA HURT

Format:	Xbox
Origin:	UK
Publisher:	Microsoft
Developer:	Rare
Release:	Q4 '03
Genre:	Beat-'em-up
Players:	1

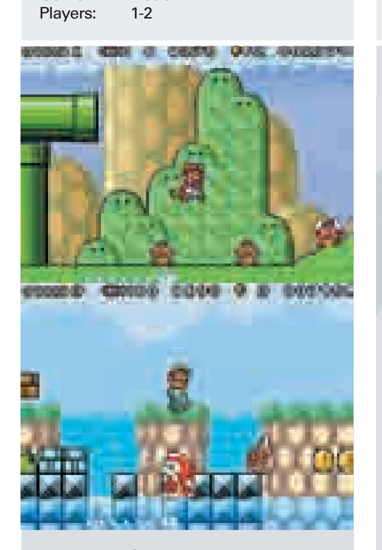
Coming as the only game from Rare that hadn't been announced before E3, *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* is a strange combination of ideas to say the least. Placing you as hero Cooper, it's your job to enter Ghoulhaven Hall and save your missus from the evil Ghoulies – mainly by solving puzzles and using anything nearby to beat the often overwhelming hordes of monsters to a pulp. Think one part *Banjo-Kazooie* (which is no coincidence, considering it's the same development team) mixed with, god help us, two parts *State Of Emergency*, all with the typical Rare touch. Hopefully, that'll be enough to turn the game to gold when it arrives later this year.



SMA4: SUPER MARIO BROS 3

AND IT'S ABOUT TIME TOO

Format:	Game Boy Advance
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	In-House
Release:	October '03
Genre:	Platform
Players:	1-2



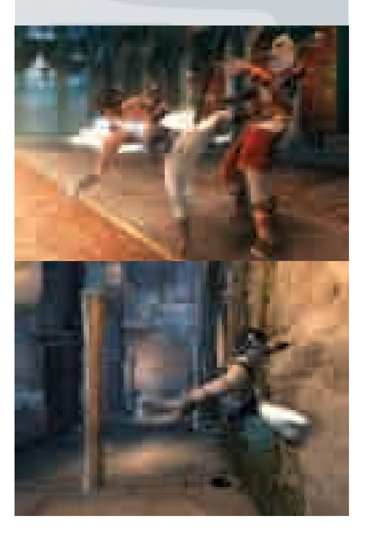
At last, it's finally here. Believed by many to be one of the best *Mario* games ever, you'd have thought that Nintendo would have ported *Super Mario Bros 3* to the GBA long before now. As you'd expect, this is a perfect port of the updated SNES version (taken from *Super Mario All-Stars*) and can be linked to any of the other *SMA* games. Interestingly, *SMA4* also gives you the chance to put the e-Card Reader to good use – by scanning special cards (that'll no doubt appear when the game comes out), you can unlock new levels and special game features. All things considered, this could be the greatest *Mario* game on the GBA so far.

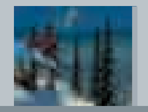
PRINCE OF PERSIA: SANDS OF TIME

JUST DON'T GET IT IN YOUR SANDWICHES

Format:	PS2/Xbox/GC/PC/GBA
Origin:	Canada
Publisher:	Ubi Soft
Developer:	Ubi Soft Montreal
Release:	November '03
Genre:	Action/Adventure
Players:	1

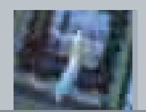
If you're going to resurrect a long-respected franchise, you've got to do it properly – a lesson learnt when Mattel brought the *Prince Of Persia* series for the Dreamcast and turned it into a shoddy *Tomb Raider*-style piece of rubbish. Thankfully, the franchise has now fallen into the combined laps of Ubi Soft Montreal (the studio behind *Splinter Cell*) and Jordan Mechner, creator of the original *POP* game. The results so far speak for themselves; recreated with some incredible animation, the Prince is most certainly back. Combine this with massive palace-based levels and a plot that holds true to the premise of the original and Ubi Soft could have a winner.





SSX 3 (MULTI)

■ *SSX* has always been about big air and even bigger tricks, so we're glad this new title doesn't appear to disappoint. Of course, whether it'll do anything new over the last game is another question.



T.H.U.G (MULTI)

■ Or, more specifically, *Tony Hawk Underground*. We weren't sure how the *Tony Hawk* series could get better, but it has – amazing graphics, new modes and an original Story section could make this the best yet.

KARAOKE REVOLUTION

YOU ONLY SING WHEN YOU'RE WINNING

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Konami
Developer:	Harmonix
Release:	Q1 '04 (US: November '03)
Genre:	Music
Players:	1-2

Considering that the Xbox version of *Dancing Stage Ultramix* will feature online play and the ability to put in your own soundtrack, we almost thought Konami had run out of ideas for the music genre. Of course, that was before it revealed *Karaoke Revolution*; the world's first console karaoke game. Developed by the company that brought us *FreQuency*, the game uses the USB headset microphone and cutting-edge voice recognition software to judge you on your singing ability across a range of musical styles. Sounds bizarre? Well, yes – but with Konami's success in the world of dancing games, there's no reason why this shouldn't hit all the right notes too.

METROID: ZERO MISSION

THE BITCH IS BACK

Format:	Game Boy Advance
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	In-House
Release:	TBA
Genre:	Action/Adventure
Players:	1

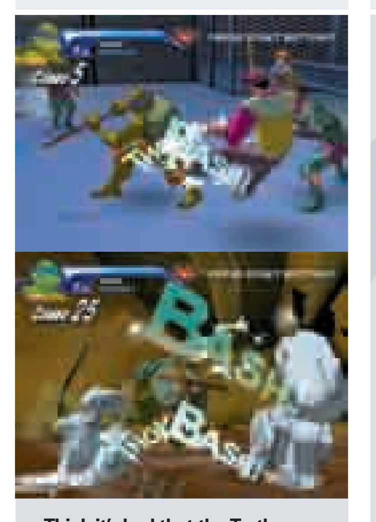
Given the fact that *Metroid Fusion* was exactly the kind of game we wanted it to be (*Super Metroid*, but with new levels), it's pretty obvious that we're looking forwards to Samus' next handheld outing. Of course, this being a combination of Nintendo and the GBA, it'll probably come as no surprise to learn that there appears to be little difference between *Metroid Fusion* and the upcoming *Metroid: Zero Mission*. Aside from a completely different setting and a bunch of new enemies (including the monstrous Kraid from *Super Metroid*), it's still the same 2D side-scrolling platform action as last time. Is that a bad thing? We certainly hope not…



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

THEY'RE HEROES IN A HALF-SHELL, APPARENTLY

Format:	PS2/Xbox/GC/PC/GBA
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Konami
Developer:	In-House
Release:	October '03
Genre:	Beat-'em-up
Players:	1-2



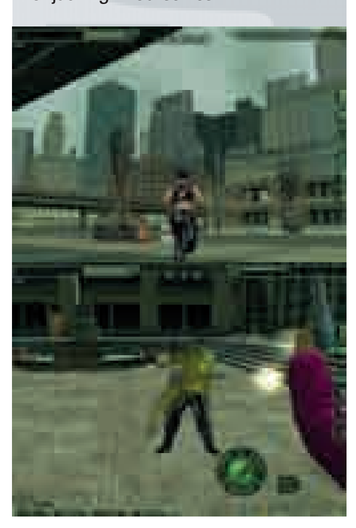
Think it's bad that the Turtles are back? Well, you're wrong. Based on the new-look cartoon series of the same name (hence the rather obvious cel-shaded look), Konami is doing its level best to ensure that none of the gameplay from the best *Turtles* titles is lost in this new update. With the choice of picking your favourite Turtles and then fighting through 35 stages of Foot Clan-bashing action, or heading for the Versus mode and taking on your friends as either the Turtles or their enemies and friends – including Splinter, Shredder and April O'Neil – we're looking for some big things from this impressive-looking scrolling beat-'em-up.

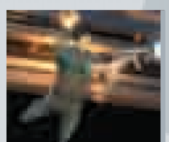
THE MATRIX ONLINE

SOMEONE ANSWER THE PHONE

Format:	PC
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Ubi Soft
Developer:	Monolith Productions
Release:	TBA 2004
Genre:	MMORPG
Players:	TBA

Think about it – what better way to represent the world of *The Matrix* than through an online, massively multiplayer RPG where players take on the role of a character inside a computer-generated world? We're surprised that no-one thought of it before. Still, after the disappointment that was *Enter The Matrix*, we hope that *The Matrix Online* doesn't go down the same path; although the fact that it's being developed by a company with such a prestigious pedigree as Monolith gives us at least some hope. It's not due until after *Matrix Revolutions* comes out at the end of the year, but we're already excited about the prospect of jacking in ourselves…





JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING (MULTI)

■ EA's persistence with the *James Bond* licence produces another FPS title, due for the end of the year. Seeing as *007: Nightfire* was a respectable game, we've got reasonable hopes for this one.

"LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE COMBINES THE STRONGEST ELEMENTS THE FRANCHISE HAS BROUGHT TO THE VIDEOGAMING UNIVERSE"

ROB DYER, PRESIDENT, EIDOS INTERACTIVE US

GEIST

MOVE OVER, TIMOTHY CLAYPOLE

Format: GameCube
Origin: US
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: n-Space
Release: TBA
Genre: FPS
Players: 1-4



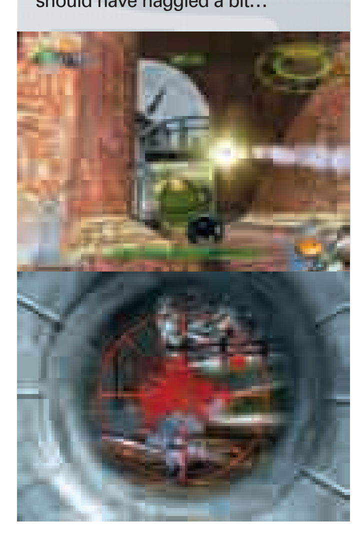
First-person shooters are all pretty much the same these days – take control of one character and then lay waste to anything that moves. But what if instead of being one person, you could take control of anyone you wanted? Such is the case with *Geist*, an interesting take on the FPS genre. Playing as a ghost searching for your body within a shadowy medical facility, you can possess anyone you meet (provided you can scare them first) and then use their skills to continue your mission, as well as using all the weapons available to them. It sounds clever, but can unproven first-time developer n-Space deliver the goods? We'll let you know when we find out.

CONKER: LIVE AND UNCUT

COMPLETE WITH GREAT MIGHTY POO

Format: Xbox
Origin: UK
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Rare
Release: TBA
Genre: Adventure/Shoot-'em-up
Players: 1 (1-12 Online)

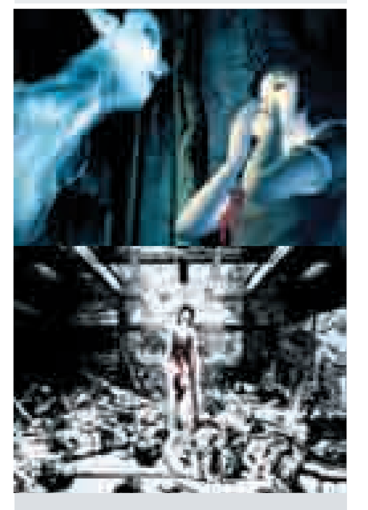
Disappointed with Rare? Us? Most certainly. Having been all excited about the concept of seeing a new *Conker* game on the Xbox since last year's X02 event, the fact that all we'll be getting is a rehashed version of the original (with online options for the multiplayer modes) is enough to make us swear more than the red-haired squirrel himself. Okay, so we won't deny the first game was great and we'll be more than happy playing it all over again with nicer graphics on Microsoft's machine, but still, we were hoping for so much more than this. £300 million for a handful of updated N64 titles? We can't help thinking Microsoft should have haggled a bit…



FATAL FRAME 2: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

CLEAN UNDERPANTS AT THE READY…

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: In-House
Release: Q4 '03
Genre: Survival Horror
Players: 1



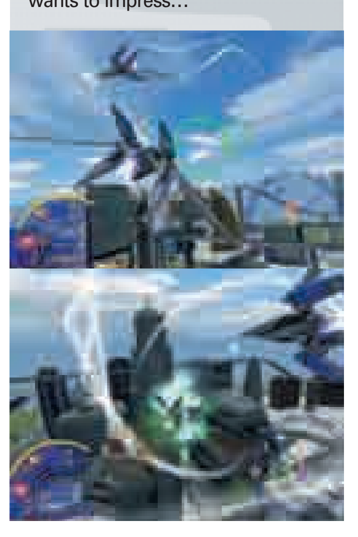
We've said it before and we'll say it again – *Fatal Frame* (or *Project: Zero*, as it's known over here) is one of the most under-rated and downright scary examples of the survival horror genre ever. Thankfully then, you haven't got long to hide behind the sofa before the sequel arrives. This time, it's set in a mysteriously abandoned village in the middle of a forest and focuses on the story of Mio Amakura and her twin sister Mayu, although you're still only armed with a spiritually-powered camera to keep the ghosts at bay. Promising to be even scarier and more graphic than the original ever was, we're already worried about turning out the lights.

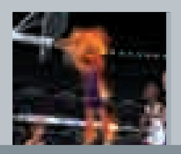
STARFOX 2

LET'S FLY, LET'S FLY AWAY

Format: GameCube
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Namco
Release: Q1 '04
Genre: Shoot-'em-up
Players: 1-4

If you're still smarting from the disappointment of *StarFox Adventures*, the news that Namco was developing a new game based on the original *StarFox* titles probably cheered you up a bit. Having seen the game at E3 though, we can't help feeling a little let down. Yes, so the game takes things back to the franchise's roots but the fact that it also looks suspiciously like the previous N64 incarnation (albeit in high-res) is certainly less than we expected. Plus we're not totally convinced with the idea of running around on foot in a game that's meant to be about flying. Namco had better pull its socks up with this one if it wants to impress…





NBA JAM (MULTI)

■ **We're oh-so-happy that this classic basketball franchise has been resurrected, although things have moved on somewhat since its last instalment. Will Acclaim's new game be good enough to beat *NBA Street 2*?**

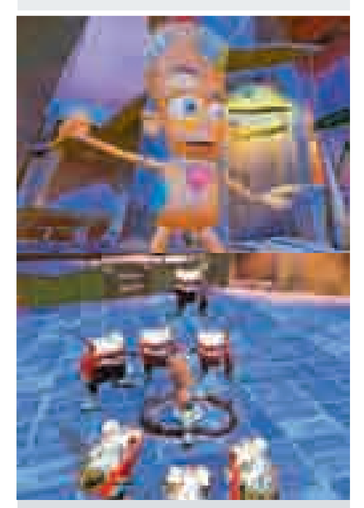
"[THE MATRIX ONLINE] WILL TAKE FANS INTO A PERSISTENT WORLD WHERE THEY CAN FULLY EXPLORE THE VAST REALM OF THE MATRIX"

JOEL SILVER, PRODUCER, THE MATRIX TRILOGY

VOODOO VINCE

HE'LL PUT A SPELL ON YOU…

Format:	Xbox
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Microsoft
Developer:	Beep Industries
Release:	Q4 '03 (US: Q3 '03)
Genre:	Action/Adventure
Players:	1



Think that playing with dolls really isn't your thing? That's because you've never played with Voodoo Vince – he might be made of burlap, but he brings a whole new meaning to the phrase 'no pain, no gain'. In order to get past the numerous enemies standing between you and your owner, Madam Charmaine, you'll need to hurt yourself in any way possible. Being a voodoo doll means Vince can project his pain onto others, so anything from setting yourself on fire, being struck by lightning, impaling yourself on pins or letting heavy objects fall on you is going to have a similar effect on the bad guys. It's so obvious, yet totally ingenious – we can hardly wait.

PSO EPISODE III: CARD REVOLUTION

ANYONE FOR A GAME OF CARDS?

Format:	GameCube
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	SEGA
Developer:	Sonic Team
Release:	Q1 '04 (Jap: Q4 '03)
Genre:	Strategy
Players:	1-4

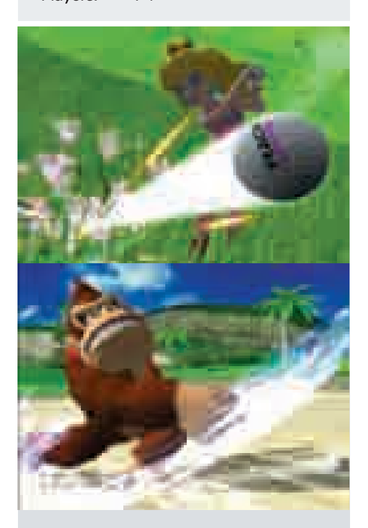
It's doubtful that one magazine's opinion makes much of a difference, but seeing as our opinion that the repetitive gameplay of *PSO Episodes 1&2* wasn't up to much ruffled so many feathers, we're glad Sonic Team has made a significant change to the gameplay in *PSO Episode III*. Surprisingly, this new style is a bizarre hybrid of Activision's *Lost Kingdoms* and Konami's *Yu-Gi-Oh!* games – players build card decks consisting of monsters, weapons and Assist items, before battling it out either online or offline and trading cards to form the perfect deck. It sounds interesting, but whether it'll work is another matter altogether.



MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

THE BEST WAY TO RUIN A GOOD WALK

Format:	GameCube
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	Camelot
Release:	Q1 '04 (US: 28 July)
Genre:	Sports
Players:	1-4



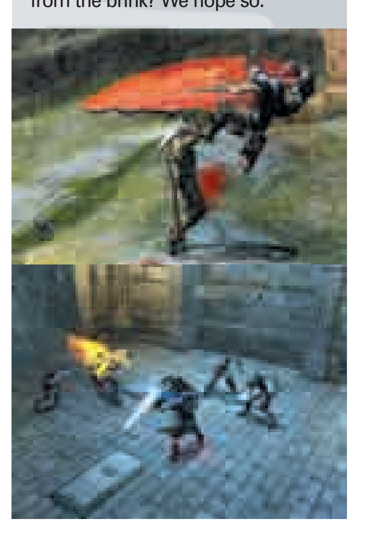
Having already had great success with it on the N64, it'll come as no surprise that Nintendo is currently putting the finishing touches to *Mario Golf* on the GameCube – a no-holds-barred example of how to make hitting a small ball with a long stick fun. Delivering pretty much the same material as the N64 game (plenty of courses, characters and even connectivity with the handheld version of the game), the one big difference is the inclusion of courses full of *Mario*-styled gimmicks; everything from Warp Pipes and Piranha Plants to vicious Chain Chomps and Thwomps. The question is though, will it be enough to beat the mighty Tiger Woods?

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

TWO VAMPIRES FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

Format:	PlayStation2/Xbox
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Eidos Interactive
Developer:	Crystal Dynamics
Release:	Q3 '03
Genre:	Action/Adventure
Players:	1

Despite being fans of the *Legacy Of Kain* series since its PSone inception, we can't help but feel that it has slipped a bit recently; *Soul Reaver 2* was obviously cut short in order to meet its release date, while *Blood Omen 2* just couldn't match the standard of the original game. However, the announcement of *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* has certainly hooked our interest – not only because Crystal Dynamics is rejuvenating the moody feel of the first *Soul Reaver*, but you'll be able to play as both Raziel and Kain, two enemies forced to unite against a common enemy. Could it be enough to bring the series back from the brink? We hope so.





Who you calling a freak, bub? **X-Men Arcade [Konami] 1992**



3UP 0000
INSERT COINS
4UP 0000
INSERT COINS
CYCLOPS



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THE POTENTIAL OF HACKERS TO PUT PEOPLE OFF PLAYING IS SOMETHING
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THE HYPE MAY HAVE REACHED FEVER PITCH, BUT WILL THE ACTIVITIES OF CHEATERS BURST THE ONLINE GAMING BUBBLE?

Make no mistake – online games are the future. The arrival of online capabilities for the current batch of consoles this year only underlines this fact. Microsoft believes in this future so much, it put Xbox Live at the heart of its push for console dominance, and gamers are largely hopeful that playing online will transform gaming for the better. Publishers are queuing up to join a bandwagon that, if analysts are to be believed, will be worth in the region of $5 billion (£3 billion) globally by 2006.

But there's a maggot in this apple and, if left unchecked, it threatens to destroy the online gaming dream. The problem is cheating. Widespread cheating has plagued numerous online PC titles, such as *Diablo* and *Dark Age Of Camelot*, disrupting games and giving the titles' creators endless headaches. Console titles are not immune either as anyone who witnessed the depressing slide of the Dreamcast version of *Phantasy Star Online* into a quagmire of hacks and egos will confirm.

While no figures on the extent of cheating exist, the problem will be familiar to most online players. "Any game with a multiplayer ability will have cheats available if it has a decent-sized player base," reckons Duncan Chard, a *Counter-Strike* administrator for online gaming service BarrysWorld. "I think about five per cent of first-person shooter

NO ACTION FOR ONLINE CHEATS

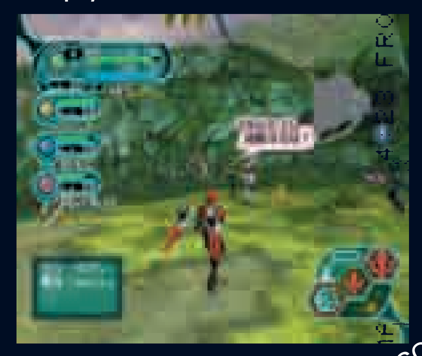
While online cheats have achieved pariah status amongst gamers, cheating in offline games remains commonplace. Dating back to the 8-bit golden years of peeks and pokes to the powerful cheat packs like Action Replay, cheating in offline games has been an almost integral part of videogaming.

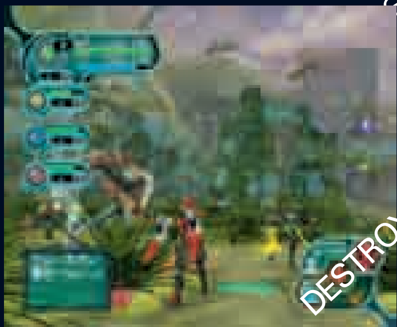
Products like Action Replay offer gamers a wide choice of cheats and hacks for offline games but the problems that online cheating cause mean you're unlikely to see such cheats in these packs.

"We fully support creating an uneven playing field when you're playing a single-player game, but when others are paying money to compete against you then most forms of cheating are grossly unfair," says Grant Hughes, spokesman for the firm behind Action Replay, Datel.

"We don't condone cheating in online games and have steadfastly refused to release cheat codes for games like *Phantasy Star Online* on the GameCube, despite many requests."

At most, adds Hughes, Datel may include cheats that give players access to previously unavailable characters or arenas but that don't give them an unfair advantage over other players.





…GOT IN THIS APPLE AND, IF LEFT UNCHECKED, IT THREATENS TO DESTROY THE ONLINE GAMING DREAM. THE PROBLEM IS CHEATING.

DESTROY THE ONLINE GAMING DREAM. THE PROBLEM IS CHEATING.



"ANY GAME WITH A MULTIPLAYER ABILITY WILL HAVE CHEATS AVAILABLE IF IT HAS A DECENT-SIZED PLAYER BASE"

players regularly cheat and probably about 75 per cent or more have tried a cheat at one point or another."

Anti-cheater sentiment is certainly commonplace among online gamers who can barely conceal their anger at how cheaters have ruined their games. Carl James, a student at Anglia Polytechnic in Chelmsford, was on the receiving end of one particularly bad incident while playing *Phantasy Star Online*.

"I'd been playing *Phantasy Star Online* on the Dreamcast. It was fun hooking up with players from across the world and developing my character," he recalls. "But then during a game some people thought it would be fun to erase my character, a bloke with a gun, and replace it with a blonde-haired girl dressed in blue. I had spent something like 20 to 30 hours building up my character and it was gone in an instant, I was furious." As a result, James gave up on the game and traded it in.

The potential of hackers to put people off playing is something that could well stop online gaming in its tracks.

"It is already happening a lot on the current crop of titles although serious gamers are, to an extent, likely to realise that it is more of a problem on some, rather than all, titles," says Matt Pritchard, a developer at Ensemble Studios, the team behind the successful *Age Of Empires* real-time strategy games. "But for a more casual audience, cheating could very well drive them away for good. For example, *The Sims* has tapped into a non-traditional audience, but if there were large amounts of cheating in *The Sims Online*, and I don't know if there are, it could well cause players to walk away from online games for good."

Given that online gaming is portrayed as adding a social dimension that will help attract non-gamers, the impact such experiences could have on the industry could be huge.

However, the task of curtailing cheating is made all the more difficult by the sheer volume of hackers doing the rounds. From superimposed crosshairs in first-person shooters to auto-targeting aimbots, those fighting the cheaters have their work cut out for them. And as if this was not enough, it is not unknown for players to find ways of twisting seemingly benign game features to unfairly hinder their opponents.

"In *Age Of Empires* we had a problem where some players were abusing the pause command," says Pritchard. "Players who were losing in multiplayer games would hit the pause button and as soon as the other player unpaused they would hit pause again. The idea was to drag out the game for so long that it was not allowed to finish and therefore didn't count as a defeat."

ANONYMITY: THE PHANTOM MENACE

Ensemble solved the issue with a patch that placed a limit on the number of pauses a player could make during a multiplayer match. But not everything can be stopped by patches and some players even unplug their PCs mid-game to avoid losing, leaving the game unfinished and the result unrecorded.

Pritchard believes the prevalence of cheating in online games is largely down to players hiding behind their online anonymity.

"You wouldn't let people behave like this if you were playing a board game face-to-face, you'd reach over and slap them," he says. "People are behaving in ways that they would never dare to face-to-face and that's a problem unique to online games. That we're used to playing alone or face-to-face is also part of it, we don't have a set of manners on how to behave."

The explosion of cheating has also generated a sense of distrust among players in several online games. This lack of trust is such a problem that legitimate players who are good at the games they play can often find themselves booted off games after accusations of cheating.

"It's a more recent problem. Players know cheats exist but do not know how to spot a cheater," explains Chard. "So there is a tendency for some players to cry out at every lucky headshot through a wall in a game like *Counter-Strike*. This can be very

A BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO… CHEATING

IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT HACKERS AND CHEATERS HAVE THEIR OWN LANGUAGE – IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE UP AGAINST, YOU WON'T HAVE A CHANCE…

WALL HACK
This cheat makes the walls in first-person shooters transparent. As such, it gives players forewarning of what is round the next corner and a greater chance of surprise kills in games like *Counter-Strike* where players can shoot through walls.

AIMBOT
An auto-targeting hack that takes the effort out of mowing down your opponents. Given the effectiveness of the cheat many versions incorporate a delay designed to try to make the cheating look less obvious.

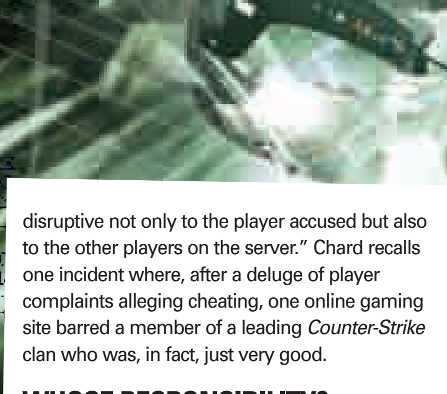
WHITE WALLS
Another cheat for first-person shooters. This one turns the walls white so that your opponents stand out more clearly, thus making them easier to dispose of.

MACROS
This family of cheats automatically repeats particular actions and can be used to help boost player stats in online role-playing games or take the effort out of building up armies in real-time strategy games.

FLASH HACK
Specific to *Counter-Strike,* this cheat disables the effects of Flashbombs, turning the tables on those that set off the blast.

LAG HACK
Creates severe lag in the game for other players, to the extent that the game is rendered unplayable. As a result, the other players tend to quit, making the cheater the winner by default.

DUPING
Allows the cheater to make copies of any item in the game. Common in online role-playing games, where it is often used to counterfeit money and weapons.



IT IS EASIER TO BLAME CHEATING AND LAG FOR POOR PERFORMANCE

disruptive not only to the player accused but also to the other players on the server." Chard recalls one incident where, after a deluge of player complaints alleging cheating, one online gaming site barred a member of a leading *Counter-Strike* clan who was, in fact, just very good.

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

Online gamer Adam Wickens, a civil servant, believes some players are abusing measures designed to combat cheating. "For some egotistical players, cheating is the only plausible excuse for someone being better than them," he says. "It is easier to blame cheating and lag for poor performance."

The potential for cheating to poison the atmosphere is such that the arrival of online console gaming this year was backed up with various counter measures. Most prominent is Xbox Live's fixed identity feature, which gives each Xbox one theoretically unchangeable online identity so cheaters can be easily tracked both by Microsoft and other players. But it is still too early to see if such measures will save console players from cheaters.

Efforts such as those implemented by console manufacturers to stop cheating before it even starts will only get so far in dealing with the problem, and much of the pressure to fight back rests on the shoulders of game developers and publishers.

"It would be foolish to suggest that this is an area that can be completely controlled by the publishers," says Stefan McGarry of publishers Mindscape, whose forthcoming horror first-person shooter *Painkiller* will support online gaming. "However, most games should have a point of contact at the development team for feedback about hacking. If a player uses a cheat and it's picked up by other players then they can feed it back to the developers to fix."

The need to be able to produce new fixes ▷



WHO YA GONNA CALL?

GAME DEVELOPERS ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES WORKING TO STOP THE CHEATS – A RAFT OF THIRD-PARTY ANTI-CHEAT SOFTWARE HAS EMERGED IN RECENT YEARS. WE CAUGHT UP WITH TOM RAY OF EVEN BALANCE, THE CREATORS OF LEADING ANTI-CHEAT TOOL PUNKBUSTER, TO ASK HIM WHY IT'S NEEDED.

GAMES™: WHAT DOES PUNKBUSTER DO?
Tom Ray: PunkBuster scans the systems of players while they play, looking for cheats to report it to other players and admins. When a cheat is found, PunkBuster also removes the offending player. It works in a similar way to a virus checker and it can be auto-updated on the fly.

G™: WHO BUYS PUNKBUSTER?
TR: We actively pursue game developers and publishers who license PunkBuster for distribution as an optional add-on for their games. The first licensee was id Software [developers of *Quake* and *Doom*] and they deserve a ton of praise from gamers for taking the first serious step to fight cheating from inside the gaming industry.

G™: WHY IS ANTI-CHEAT SOFTWARE NEEDED? SURELY IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GAME DEVELOPER?
TR: Some game developers tried at first to fight the cheating but became discouraged when it seemed like the more they tried, the worse the problem got. Most game developers and publishers are still doing nothing on this issue, which is unfortunate for their customers. There is simply no excuse these days for a game company to ignore the cheating issue. Game players should just stop buying games that do not have active anti-cheat protection.

G™: GIVE US AN EXAMPLE OF PUNKBUSTER AT WORK.
TR: There was a time when a player from a top European clan got upset with his clan mates and left. He emailed us a copy of a secret cheat the clan all used. We built in detection to PunkBuster and released the auto-update to coincide with that clan's next match. They were all caught in the middle of the match. Needless to say their league record was nullified and the clan broke up shortly after that.



ONLINE CHEATERS, SOURCE OF ALL EVIL...

or patches to deal with cheating and other problems is something that may force a fundamental change in how developers work.

"Developers are going to have to commit resources to games even after they've shipped," says Pritchard. "On *Age Of Mythology*, for example, we have a group of people who deal with problems as they appear. We have to make that commitment, it doesn't just end once the product is boxed and on the shelves any more."

TIME FOR INDUSTRY ACTION

The same is true for publishers, says McGarry. "As publishers, it is important to see each online title as needing continual upgrades to help minimise the risks," he states. Players themselves, PC gamers in particular, are starting to fight back by shifting their games onto privately controlled pay-to-play servers.

"Pay-to-play will help eliminate the threat as cheaters will hardly ever be willing to pay to have fun by cheating," reckons Wickens. The arrival of anti-cheater software tools like Punkbuster for *Quake III* is also playing a major role in pushing cheats out of the picture.

"Developments in anti-cheat software have helped," says Wickens. "There was a point when online cheating in *Counter-Strike* was stupidly common, but things have eased off now, though it still happens." Chard agrees: "I think awareness of cheating in games has risen a lot recently. But the actual amount of cheating in *Counter-Strike* has tailed off recently due to the efforts of the anti-cheat community."

Other relatively untested ideas about how to further quash cheating are also being floated by players and developers.

"We need to look at the possibility of using referees similar to those in sports," says Pritchard. "For example, in massively multiplayer games people have been employed by companies to be in the game and keep an eye on what is going on."

McGarry believes improved communication between the players and the developers is another way of undermining cheats. "Although online players have a responsibility to play within the rules, there will always be individuals who try and crack the system," he says. "But if no-one complains then it is difficult to track cheating and nothing will get fixed."

Another problem holding the games industry back from confronting the issue head-on is a lack of willingness among publishers and developers to talk openly about the issues.

"The industry doesn't want to talk about cheating as the companies don't like to publicly admit that there's a problem," says Pritchard. "Nearly all real-time strategy games have had teething problems with cheating but the industry will not discuss it. This is part of the problem as this silence keeps us from addressing the problem."

And unless the industry clamps down on cheating the likelihood is that people will continue to give up on online titles out of frustration. And if that continues then the predictions of online gaming's worth may need to be scaled back rather drastically. For something that's still in its infancy, it would be a tragically early death.

YOUR THOUGHTS ON CHEATING

WE ASKED ONLINE GAMERS HOW CHEATING HAD AFFECTED THEM.

"CHEATING IN SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 2 HAS MEANT THE CLAN I'M IN HAS LOST ABOUT FOUR REGULAR MEMBERS. THEY'VE STOPPED PLAYING THE GAME ALTOGETHER BECAUSE OF THE CHEATING CLANS WE CAME ACROSS."
– KevinUK

"I got caught macroing in *Ultima Online* once and they put me in this cell room for two hours with no way out. Gits." – GEF

"Cheating in online games is like a disease which eats away at them. It makes people paranoid. This leads to abuse and accusations for genuinely good players. This all causes huge flame wars and then more people begin to cheat just to even the playing field as they see it." – DANIEL B

"If I was paying a subscription for a game, having to put up with cheating would be even more annoying than it already is." – CARL JAMES

"Cheating in online games completely ruins a game as it obviously gives somebody an unfair advantage over someone else. It is annoying when somebody cheats but the majority of people out there don't or, if they do, it's not noticeable. It hasn't changed my view of online games, as cheaters have always been there. You take it for granted they're there and if you are playing against one, just leave the game." - SUPER AI

"Anyone who feels the need to cheat in any multiplayer game needs to ask themselves why they do it. They obviously aren't particularly good at the game if that is the only way they can achieve the highest rating. It gets them nothing but a false sense of superiority over the other players." - SIAN_RAVEN

"Cheating on an online game is possibly the most pointless act you could ever carry out. Anyone who would do such a thing should be taken out back and shot. Repeatedly. With a big gun." – DRANNY

"Online cheaters: source of all evil. My save of *PSO* got corrupted by someone on the Dreamcast version, who then ran round the Net on the game with my ID. Not amused." – KIMWILD

"I wouldn't cheat on an online game. Isn't the point of playing online to prove that you're better than everyone else?" – NIMMO

"*PSO* on the Dreamcast was totally ruined by cheaters. I spent more time looking for a server with no cheaters on than playing the game. SEGA could do little to stop them, so in the end I gave up. Cheaters ruined my file and wasted my £40…" – MATTY FOSTER

"In *Quake II*, there's a level where a quad damage respawns and is fairly easy to get. So I get it a lot. Then the guy I'm playing with accuses me of cheating. How can I possibly disprove this? And why should I bother? It's not my fault he doesn't know the damn map…" – UNLEASH

"I've never cheated online, but I've certainly used scripts in games using *Half-Life*'s engine to perform complex actions. It would take too long to boon him down with an automatic rifle, so I hit one button that causes my character to pull out his shotgun, fire off both barrels simultaneously then switch back to my previous weapon. Would you call that cheating or exploitation?" – BRAVE ULYSSES

"CHEATERS. HATE THE BASTARDS".
– ONO


¡SHABA!

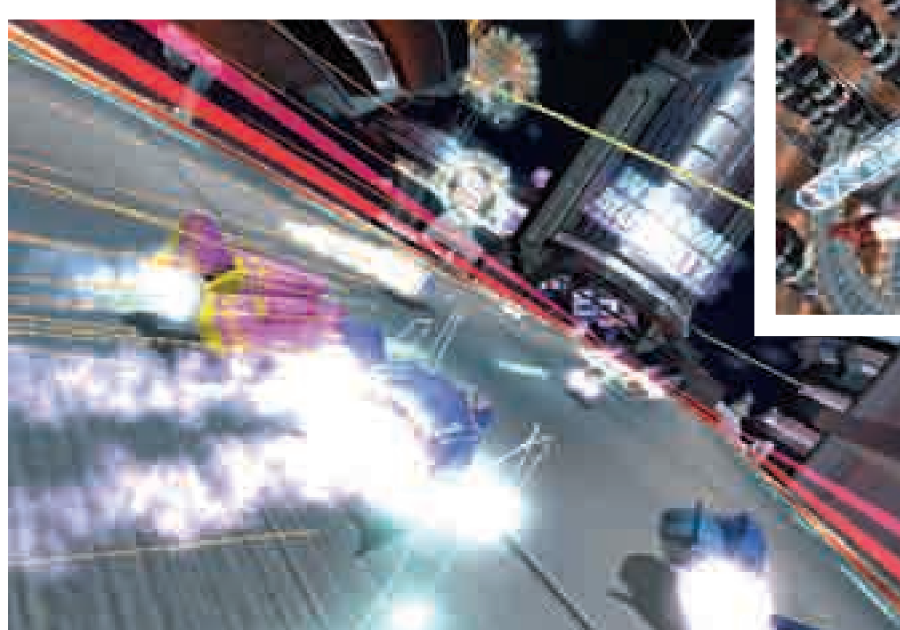


In yet another example of digitised extreme sportsmanship, Shaun Murray invites you to try wakeboarding, but without the inconvenience of wet feet and mussed hair.

REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.





When flying through the air, you'll have to glide using the tilt of the steering wheel.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA/Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Amusement Vision

PRICE
£1 per play

RELEASE
October '03
(Japan: July '03)

PLAYERS
1-4

STAR WARS RACER

BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS...



DAYTONA USA

F-ZERO AX

HOLD ONTO YOUR HATS – THIS IS GOING TO BE A FAST ONE…

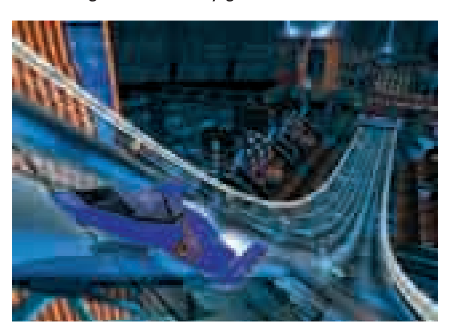
When an arcade game refuses to let you start playing until you've buckled your seatbelt, you know you're in for a bumpy ride. Of course, if you spend five minutes just watching the deluxe arcade version of *F-Zero AX* in action instead of playing it, you could probably work that one out. With its huge cabinet, booming speakers and a bucket seat that tips violently from side to side according to the action on the screen, it's fair to say that this is one intimidating piece of arcade hardware… and that's before you even sit in it.

That said though, this is one arcade game that just begs to be played regardless of how unsure you are about having a go, if only because of the pedigree that precedes it. Obviously, the fact that SEGA is presenting us with an arcade version of one of the best high-speed racing franchises ever created should be enough to get your attention – anyone who's even vaguely familiar with the history of videogames will know *F-Zero* to be a respectable brand (which can only be a good thing). However, tie that in with the fact that this newly-polished incarnation comes from the same developer who brought us the joys of *Daytona USA* – possibly one of the best examples of arcade racing ever – and you've got all the makings of a truly great high-octane racing game.

After sitting down, popping in your credit and buckling that all-important seatbelt, the first thing you'll have to concern yourself with is whether to create your own racer or not. Much like the firm's recent arcade efforts *Initial D: Arcade Stage* and *Derby Owners Club*, *F-Zero AX* puts SEGA's new Magnetic Card Reader system to good use. The game randomly generates a custom car



The seatbelt is part of the cabinet for a good reason…



You can earn Pilot Points for safe driving. Like that's gonna happen.

FAQs

Q. NEW FACES?
Quite a few – out of the 14 cars on offer, many of the racers like QQQ (in the Rolling Turtle), Digiboy (in the Cosmic Dolphin) and Princia Ramode (in the Spark Moon) are totally new.

Q. PLAY WITH MY MATES?
Absolutely. SEGA assures us that four machines can be linked up for a bit of multiplayer action, although we've yet to actually see it in action.

Q. ISN'T IT TOO FAST?
Too fast? Get to the back of the class – this is *F-Zero*. While you may need some time to learn the controls, it's not exactly rocket science…



THE MISSING LINK

It's always the way – no matter how good something is, there's always a downside. Unfortunately, the downside of *F-Zero AX* is the same thing that everyone's been raving about since SEGA and Nintendo first announced it – the connectivity between the arcade and the GameCube versions of the game. Theoretically, the link allows you to use the machine's Magnetic Card system to create a custom car and build it up with Pilot Points, then download it onto a GameCube memory card and continue to enhance it on the home version of the game. Sadly though, it's more than likely that this won't be the case in Europe. While US and Japanese gamers will still be able to use this functionality, inside sources tell us that it'll be removed from both the UK arcade machines *and* the PAL GameCube version. Needless to say, we're just a tad disappointed…



The rotating track sections might make you feel a little sick…



Remember that side attack – useful for knocking opponents out.

(complete with pilot) and saves it to a storage card that you can take with you once you've finished playing. This card can store your fastest track times and race placings, but also keeps a record of the Pilot Points that you earn after finishing every race. As with other Card Reader-equipped games, repeated play is the order of the day. After amassing enough points by winning, destroying opponents and even driving safely (yeah, right), you'll be able to upgrade your vehicle by changing certain parts or even replacing the pilot, thus making it a better choice than the preset vehicles.

Finish the initial registration and things progress fairly swiftly; choose between Race or Time Trial mode (the latter of which allows you to get your times on the World Internet Rankings), then pick which of the six tracks you'd like to race on. Split into three different categories – Beginner, Normal and Advanced, just like *Daytona USA* – each pair of tracks will test your skills as a racer in unique ways, as well as bringing subtle smiles to the faces of anyone who's familiar with the *F-Zero* world. With a rejuvenated Mute City offering a basic loop that'll allow you to get the hang of the controls (which will require some mastering, even for people who think they'll be fine) and Port Town now incorporating a Big Blue-style cylindrical track that still reminds us just how frantic races can get in *F-Zero*, there's certainly more than enough variety here for anyone who's worried that it'll all be a bit samey.

Of course, the most important thing that fans of the series will be wondering is how well the game has made the transition to the arcades. Thankfully, the results are pretty much as perfect as you'd hope. It's as fast as anything, retains many of the elements present in the N64 incarnation (including side attacks and drifting, controlled via paddles located behind the main wheel) and still pits you against 29 other cars in a battle for anti-gravity racing supremacy. Obviously, certain aspects have been tweaked to make the game suitable for the arcade – the checkpoint time limits and re-spawning after falling off the track or blowing up are elements that won't be in the GameCube version, and this has had a graphics overhaul – but this is the same *F-Zero* that we all know and love.

And just like the older *F-Zero* games, it's also damn difficult. Although your choice of car and track will clearly affect your performance, even gamers who demonstrate some skill at it won't be finishing this in a hurry. Still, considering this is a) an arcade game and b) one that demands repeated visits to power up your car, that's exactly what we'd want from a game like *F-Zero AX*.



The Green Plant stage is one of the more difficult tracks, with some horribly tight turns… but at least there's nice scenery as well.



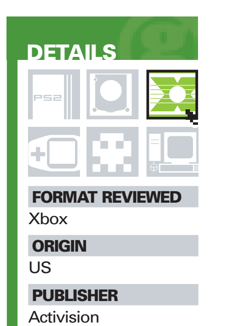
You won't notice because it streaks by at such high speed, but the backdrops for each track are absolutely gorgeous.



TIME TO RETURN TO THE NAZI-INFESTED FORTRESS WHERE THE FPS GENRE WAS BORN

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: TIDES OF WAR

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

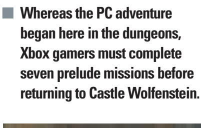
PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
id Software /Nerve/Gray Matter

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2 (Up to16 Live)



If you were to list the defining moments that really shaped today's gaming world, you'd be hard-pressed not to mention the impact made by *Wolfenstein 3D* back in 1992. The first-person perspective featured in id's breakthrough title not only allowed us to slaughter Nazis from a more satisfying viewpoint than ever before, but effectively gave birth to one of the most popular gaming genres of all time. When the long-awaited sequel finally allowed us to return to Castle Wolfenstein on the PC in 2001, the saga was brought nicely up to date in such a way that did justice to its forerunner but failed to bring anything new to the genre its grand-pappy had defined. Now the action has arrived on Xbox, but it's perhaps most significant that the online multiplayer capabilities that really stood out on the PC should bring a very welcome addition to the Xbox Live portfolio.

In the single-player campaign, players are treated to a series of prelude missions set in North Africa before being captured and carted off to the sinister Castle Wolfenstein where the PC version began. The main story revolves around Hitler and Himmler's evil plan to swing the outcome of World War II in the Nazis' favour by dabbling in the occult. As a result, our hero will not only find himself up against a good portion of the Third Reich but, as more of the shocking truth comes to light, a host of more supernatural adversaries. Although we generally find that Nazis, mutants and resurrected zombies make for some of the best cannon fodder around, *Wolfenstein*'s unusual blend of all three did tend to dilute what initially seemed to be moving along as a perfectly respectable WWII shooter. This doesn't detract too much from the game as a whole, but we weren't able to take things seriously from the point zombies came into play – in the same way the movie *From Dusk 'Til Dawn* went so horribly downhill at the first sight of vampires.

However, the game clearly never sets out to capture the gritty wartime feel of games like *Medal Of Honor* and instead delivers a more old-fashioned shooter in the true spirit of its ancestry. While an element of stealth has now been included, the main vein of the game is all-out action with none of your new-fangled depth. Everything about the gameplay seems to surpass the mediocre, but rarely ventures beyond these heights. The PC version never really pushed the boundaries of what had already gone before, and a couple of years down the line many elements don't exactly feel dated, but are pretty far from the cutting edge. Enemy AI can be reasonably difficult to deal with as Nazis skip in and out of covered positions or flee to raise the alarm, but this again lacks any real innovation and can be temperamental at the best of times.

Visually, the game follows a similar trend. Whilst environments and textures won't particularly impress, the standard remains firmly

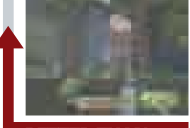
FAQs

Q. UNLOCKABLE FEATURES?
Completing the game unlocks the original *Wolfenstein 3D* title, allowing for a nostalgic trip back to where it all began.

Q. TOOLED UP?
Most certainly – a good and varied selection of WWII weaponry turns you into a walking one-man army.

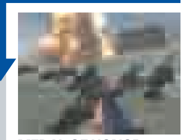
Q. HOURS OF FUN?
The main game has about 10-15 hours of life in it, but the endless joys of multiplayer help to add many more.

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II



BETTER THAN

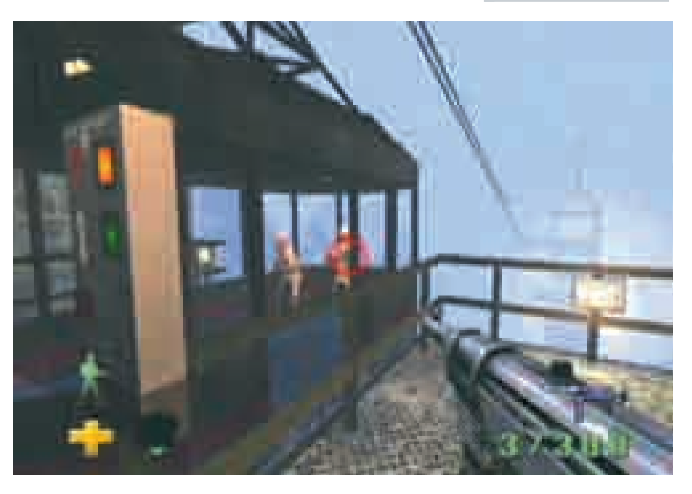
WORSE THAN



MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

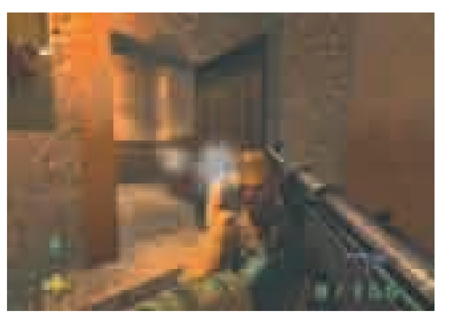
■ Whereas the PC adventure began here in the dungeons, Xbox gamers must complete seven prelude missions before returning to Castle Wolfenstein.



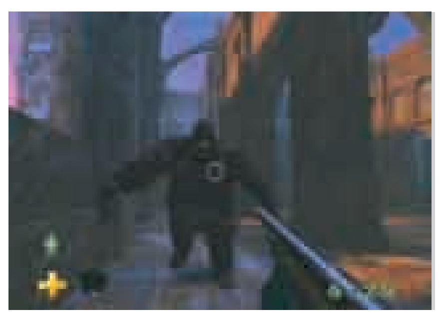




■ The outdoor missions are a very welcome sight after spending many levels navigating the mazes of claustrophobic corridors.



■ The conveyer belt of Nazis ensures you're never short of target practice, and there's a good selection of hardware to get the job done in style.



■ What have they created? Those meddling Nazis have bitten off more than they can chew and let loose some real monstrosities.

above average throughout. The action progresses through a variety of locations that give the adventure a suitably epic feel, and refreshingly balances the murky browns and greys of the indoor settings with occasional jaunts into the great outdoors. Overall this adds up to a relatively varied and entertaining shooter by today's standards, but for Xbox Live gamers the single-player campaign will be a mere peripheral to one of the most complete online gaming experiences to hit the console so far.

Though the main game doesn't quite put *Wolfenstein* among the Xbox must-haves, few console titles can compete with its superb multiplayer action. Up to 16 players can be accommodated in the squad-based battles, split into teams of Nazis and Allies. The maps are notably vast and there are a number of interesting options for play, but the most intriguing feature has to be the allocation of roles to members of your team; players can opt to take to the battlefield as either a Soldier, Lieutenant, Medic or Engineer. Soldiers are provided with the most firepower to spearhead the squad's advances, while the Lieutenants are the source of replacement ammo for combatants, since no pick-ups are made available on the maps themselves. Similarly, it is the job of the poorly armed Medics to furnish the wounded with health boosts, whereas Engineers will also attempt to stay out of harm's way as their demolitions expertise is usually crucial to the team's mission objective. Working as a team is therefore a crucial and involving aspect of play, which makes for one of the most engrossing Live concepts to date.

If you've got the online capabilities, *Wolfenstein* might prove to be an irresistible package. However, and somewhat sadly, stripping away the fantastic multiplayer skirmishes leaves lone players with a rather ordinary shooter.

VERDICT 7/10
A DECENT SHOOTER WITH EXCELLENT ONLINE POTENTIAL

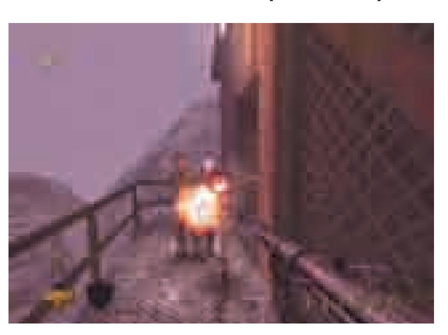


■ While stealth generally takes a back seat to the action, a few oblivious guards make for easy pickings if you're sneaky enough.



THIS PLACE LOOKS FAMILIAR…

One thing we noticed in the single-player game was how confusing the level designs can be. Though the absence of a clearly defined path enables the inclusion of many secret areas, we often found ourselves losing our way (and our patience). Most of the time, the route will bring you out of a previously locked door in an area you've already covered, forcing you to retrace your steps until you come to another door that's no longer bolted. Although the maps make for relatively simple mazes, indoor locales can look deceptively similar. Thankfully, the bodies of slain foes remain where they fall which helps you work out where you've already been.



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PS2, GBA, PC

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Ubi Soft

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

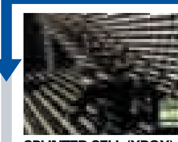
PLAYERS
1

SPLINTER CELL (PS2)



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SPLINTER CELL (XBOX)

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL

AT LONG LAST, SAM FISHER STEALTHILY INFILTRATES THE HOMES OF GAMECUBE OWNERS

The day we first popped our copy of *Splinter Cell* into the Xbox, not quite knowing what to expect from the much-hyped stealth-'em-up, is now just a distant memory. Since then, the exploits of covert operative Sam Fisher have become a gaming phenomenon, yet Cube owners have been forced to wait in line to find out for themselves what all the fuss was about. But good things allegedly come to those who wait and despite a severe lack of polish in the recent PS2 port, Ubi Soft remained adamant the GameCube *Splinter Cell* experience would be every bit as good as the original version that so deservedly took the gaming world by storm.

You must have been living underground for the last eight months not to have any idea what this game is all about, but, just in case, here's a quick recap. Players must guide Fisher through a series of covert missions using his impressive repertoire of skills to get the job done as cleanly and stealthily as possible. While the routes tend to be relatively linear, mastering the art of passing through a level completely undetected makes for some immense replay value.

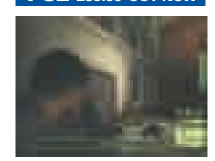
But how effectively has the superb gameplay found on the Xbox translated to the Cube? Well, although there are a few tiny differences, on the whole the GameCube version offers an equally high-quality gaming experience. On close comparison with the Xbox visuals, a few inevitable shortcomings do become evident with texturing and lighting effects, with the occasional simplification in level architecture. But unless you're actually searching for discrepancies this goes pretty much unnoticed, and certainly wouldn't spoil the experience for first-time players.

Conversely, the gift of hindsight means the Cube edition features a few trivial gameplay tweaks and it seems to run a tad smoother. Exclusive GameCube content adds to the polish, with extended cut-scenes developing a more wholesome story and GBA connectivity providing a rather gimmicky overhead radar view. But overall it's the same mix of stealth and acrobatics that we love – there simply is nothing else like it on the Cube right now.

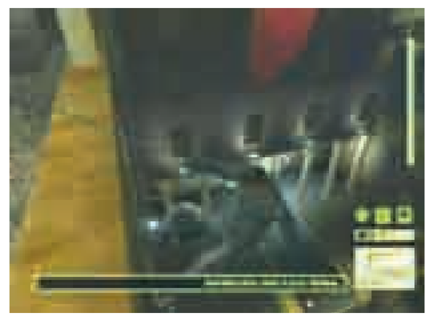


VERDICT 8/10
HAS EVERYTHING THAT MADE THE ORIGINAL SO GOOD

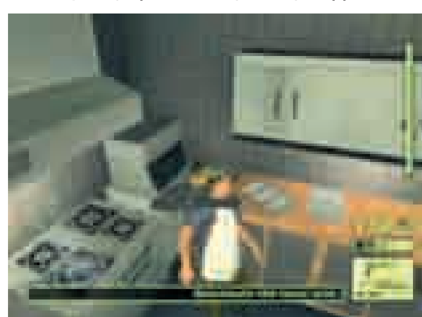
PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW



Well, there's a shock – while the PS2 port of *Splinter Cell* certainly has all the gameplay and atmosphere that the other versions offer, it comes off worst when trying to emulate the fantastic lighting and shadow effects of the Xbox version. Shame.



Sam's vast experience in covert operations puts a range of special skills at your fingertips, from abseiling to scaling drainpipes.



Despite Sam's best efforts, the Colonel's secret blend remained a secret.



Getting into a firefight is a real novice mistake. A true pro should be able to avoid confrontations completely.

games™ **FINGERPRINT**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

BREAK AND ENTER: Practise your lock picking skills using the control stick to tease those pins open.

OKAY, SO TALK: Interrogate your foes before knocking them out cold and hiding the body.





Although you begin the game alone, completed rescue missions will help add to the size of your team.



Keep your distance from these suicidal mutants – get too close and they'll try and blow you to pieces.

BRUTE FORCE

AREN'T EXCLUSIVE TITLES SUPPOSED TO BE GOOD?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Digital Anvil

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

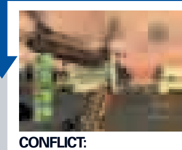
PLAYERS
1-4 (1-8 System Link)

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



CONFLICT: DESERT STORM

Continuing Microsoft's recent predilection for picking games that aren't very good to be exclusive to the Xbox (*Tao Feng*? *Kung Fu Chaos*?), *Brute Force* promised so much and ends up delivering very little. Admittedly, putting you in control of a four-strong squad of elite soldiers – each with their own unique abilities – and then beaming them onto planets packed with aliens to waste sounds okay on paper. In practice though, *Brute Force* turns out to be a demonstration of how repetitive and bland a game can be – all in less than an hour's worth of play.

Even in the first mission, the horribly repetitive nature of *Brute Force*'s gameplay is apparent – head for the yellow dot on your radar, moving through the incredibly linear terrain and shooting anything that gets in your way, then repeat once you reach the yellow dot and another appears further ahead. The dullness gets worse in combat; fighting enemies requires little more than strafing from side to side while placing the gun sight over your target and firing repeatedly, because anyone firing at you stands perfectly still and becomes a sitting duck. Of course, this stupidity isn't just reserved for the enemy; your team-mates (once you have them) happily run into dangerous situations without thinking and have no qualms about getting stuck behind the landscape.

Unfortunately, replacing your stupid allies doesn't make things better. In fact, the four-player co-op Campaign mode only makes things more difficult because of the reduction in visibility for each player. However, the Deathmatch and Squad Deathmatch modes are the nail in the coffin. Why? Because they prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that competitive multiplayer shoot-'em-ups just don't work from a third-person viewpoint; although we already knew that from games like *Quake III Arena* on the Dreamcast or *Jet Force Gemini* on the N64.

Yes, it looks as though Microsoft has signed a dud once again. Does *Brute Force* have the quality to make it a memorable classic? Nope. Is it likely to shift by the bucketload anyway? Not a chance. Will you see it in the second-hand bin of your local game shop for less than £20 in a couple of months? Definitely. After all, that's where our copy's going…

VERDICT 4/10
TOTALLY BLAND, EVEN WHEN PLAYED WITH FRIENDS

games™ CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
TWO FOR ONE: *Brute Force* relies on its system link abilities to make Deathmatch games more interesting. Up to eight people can play, but even that isn't enough to improve the gameplay.

Some missions are meant to require stealth rather than aggression; however, they usually end up turning into a complete bloodbath.






It's a kind offer, but our mums have warned us about taking 'special things' from strangers.




The lady doth protest too much – of course they're after the treasure…


Psynergy is a sort of magic that will help your quest no end.

FAQs

Q. HOW BIG?
Even though it's set in the same land, there are many more places to visit in *The Lost Age*, which makes the game last a lot longer than the previous outing.

Q. ANOTHER CLIFFHANGER?
Not this time – the story most definitely comes to an end. Of course, you shouldn't rule out another game after that though…

Q. WHY SHOULD I LINK UP?
By transferring your original save data, your old party will appear into the game – but you won't get to use their amassed power until much later in your quest.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Camelot

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
TBA
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

GOLDEN

Everyone loves a cliffhanger. The thrill of being left on tenterhooks not only makes the story more interesting, but builds anticipation for what's to come. But it can often be frustrating too; especially if you're particularly absorbed in what's going on and suddenly reach the end without warning, which why the end of the first *Golden Sun* came as a bit of a shock. If you've been there, you'll know – the fact that those who emerged victorious atop the second of four mysterious 'lighthouses' suddenly found themselves with nowhere to go was a tad confusing to say the least, and left everyone asking one thing: where was the rest of the game? Enter *Golden Sun: The Lost Age…*

Picking up the action from the same cut-scene that ended the last game (complete with a *24*-style 'last time in *Golden Sun*' recap), the game starts almost as if it never ended. Anyone who has played *Golden Sun* will notice that rather than continuing with the same heroes, you now play as Felix – a character who, while not really a bad guy, was aligned with the bad guys in the original. This puts a whole new spin on the story, as you get to experience things from the other side of the fence – rather than trying to prevent events that are rumoured to bring about the end of the world, your quest is to see them through to their conclusion. And yes, that does mean exploring the parts of the world that were untouched in the first game.

SUMMON 41

As you might expect, the fighting system in *The Lost Age* has remained almost identical to that of the original *Golden Sun*. Focused on random turn-based battles (with the occasional larger boss creature fight thrown in for good measure), everything works in pretty much the same way as it did before. The one big change, however, is the Summon command that allows you to bring forth massive beasts of destruction through the use of magical Djinn creatures. As well as keeping all the Summons from the first game, you can now command a selection of more powerful monsters by discovering various Summon Tablets from around the world map. Each tablet in your possession gives you access to a new creature, although to summon each one requires a combination of different elemental Djinn, making them more costly to call. Of course, the effects are well worth the price…

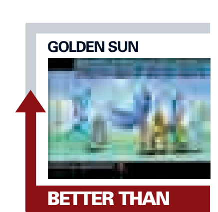
games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

FINISH HIM: You can transfer a completed save from the first game and meet your characters again.

FIGHT CLUB: As before, you can link up two games and pit your adventurers against your friends.

GOLDEN SUN



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SECRET OF MANA

SUN: THE LOST AGE

AND SO THE EPIC GBA SAGA GOES ON…

Once you start comprehending the enormity of the world in *The Lost Age*, you'll appreciate why Camelot released it as a completely separate game rather than combining it with the original *Golden Sun*. Much like *Final Fantasy VII* and *VIII* came on multiple discs for the PSone because of the size of the game, the complete *Golden Sun* saga requires two cartridges – in fact, it needed to be published as two games. Considering the original had around 30 hours of play in it, it won't come as much of a surprise to learn that *The Lost Age* is just as epic in size – with the entire bottom half of the world of Weyard and an ocean full of islands to explore, there's plenty to see and do.

However, it's what you've got to do – and how you've got to do it – that help tip the balance and make *The Lost Age* even bigger than its predecessor. Because the slate has been wiped clean thanks to the introduction of new characters, Camelot has used this opportunity to bring in many new kinds of Psynergy (or magic, to the layperson) that help make the game more demanding for RPG experts. Certainly, the ability to move objects, create tornadoes or form ice pillars out of thin air required a modicum of thought in the original; however, with many new options such as turning into sand, draining water to clear paths and grinding stone blockages into dust, you have to think a lot more about how to progress past certain puzzles. Combine this with many more areas that require revisiting to explore them further (meaning you'll have to remember where they are in the first place) and a stack of new Djinn and Summon creatures to discover and you've got a game that does everything the original did, plus a whole lot more besides.

Bigger, more intricate and rather more absorbing that the first half of the story, *The Lost Age* is not only a great continuation of the *Golden Sun* saga but also a deeply satisfying game in its own right. Unfortunately, *The Lost Age* is rather over-reliant on the fact that it's a continuation of the last game. While you can obviously play *The Lost Age* as a standalone adventure, much of the story (as well as references to characters not in the sequel and the nuances of how to use Djinn or Psynergy) will be lost on those who haven't experienced the original. This is a pity, as it may put people off – but then it should also be an incentive to buy *Golden Sun*, if only so you can enjoy the story as it was meant to be played. Believe us, handheld RPGs don't get much better than this.



VERDICT 8/10

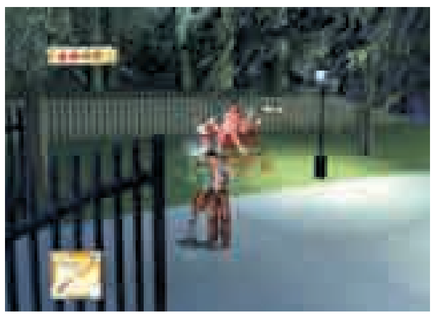
THE SAME AS BEFORE, ONLY BETTER – MUCH BETTER

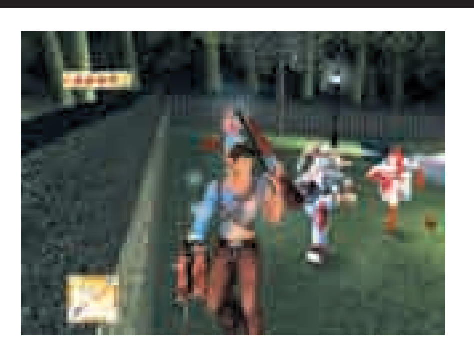


■ You'll be exploring the same world as in *Golden Sun* but this time there's much more to see and do.



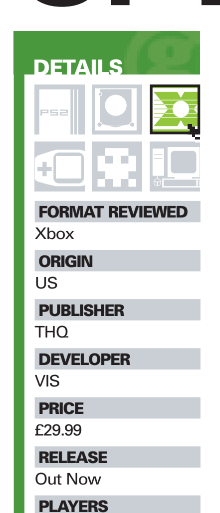






WILL THERE EVER BE SUCH A THING AS A GOOD EVIL DEAD GAME?

EVIL DEAD: A FISTFUL OF BOOMSTICK



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
VIS

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Lesson one in the *How to Make a Good Game* handbook reads: "If you're going to base a new title on an old game, make sure you use a good one". Wise words, we're sure you'll agree; but clearly, THQ didn't take heed of them when creating *Evil Dead: Fistful Of Boomstick*. Sure, it's good that the monstrosity that was *Hail To The King* was left well alone, but using *State Of Emergency* instead? Cover those ears, friends – the alarm bells are already ringing…

To be fair, *Fistful Of Boomstick* actually sounds quite interesting on paper. The Deadites are loose again and it's up to zombie-slaying hero Ash Williams to save the day once more. Despite starting off with only his trusty 'Boomstick' shotgun for protection, you can quickly equip him with various weapons, including the ever-useful and totally brutal chainsaw. But be warned – though the Deadites may only attack in dribs and drabs at first, after a while, you'll find yourself up to your neck in the critters with up to 50 enemies appearing on screen at any one time. Sound good? Yes, but that's before you actually start playing it.

Okay, so *Fistful Of Boomstick* is all about merciless violence and excessive body counts; just like *State Of Emergency* (but without the rotting corpses and ancient evil), meaning that the action is always frantic. However, it also means that after a short while, the whole 'blasting zombies' thing spirals into mindless repetition and leaves you craving something more. It would help if the missions offered more than just thankless trudging back and forth through blandly-textured and similar-looking areas, looking for a key or other item that will allow you to progress… but they don't. On the plus side though, we can actually be positive about a game being tied to a movie for once – the fact that the game is based on the *Evil Dead* licence adds a bit of character to the proceedings, even if it does appear at times as though Bruce Campbell merely phoned in his performance as the ever-troubled Ash.

Not surprisingly, all this adds up to a game that, while mildly enjoyable in short bursts, doesn't deliver in the long run – although the cheaper-than-usual price and free copy of *Evil Dead 2* on DVD that comes with it might be enough to convince you otherwise. Still, if it's no-brainer and repetitive action you want, then at least this is better than *State Of Emergency*.

■ Quick! Boil a kettle – that'll get rid of those marauding Deadites. Oh, no, wait – that's ants, isn't it?

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

ZOMBIE NATION: It's *State Of Emergency*, but with Bruce Campbell and hordes of Deadites. Cool.
FREEBIES: Buy the game and you'll get a free copy of *Evil Dead 2* on DVD as well. Bargain.

STATE OF EMERGENCY



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



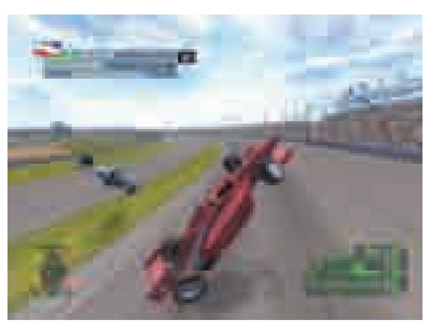
ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBOURS

PS2 £29.99



Despite minor discrepancies in the graphics and sound departments, there is little difference from the Xbox version although, thankfully, the incredibly annoying refresh problem isn't apparent here.

VERDICT 5/10
MEDIOCRE ACTION WITH A CAPITAL 'YAWN'



The realistic physics make for some entertaining pile-ups, and could help vent some of your frustration at throwing away forty quid…



With your opponents maintaining speeds of around 200mph for the duration, one poorly taken corner can all but end your title aspirations.



Fully licensed drivers, cars, tracks and teams add an element of authenticity for any fans of American motorsport, complete with ESPN commentary.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

NO RIGHT TURN: IndyCar takes place on huge oval tracks that rarely require drivers to decelerate.

HOUSEHOLD NAMES: Take to the track as your favourite IndyCar racing star, like, erm…?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Codemasters

DEVELOPER
Brain In A Jar

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
June '03
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

INDYCAR SERIES

THE 'GREATEST SPECTACLE IN RACING'? PULL THE OTHER ONE

In the US of A they call it the 'Greatest Spectacle in Racing', and a capacity congregation of around 450,000 fans makes the Indy 500 the world's most attended one-day sporting event. But while a bunch of F1-style cars tearing around an oval track again and again for 500 miles may pull in the crowds, an entertaining gaming concept it most certainly ain't. And, sadly, no amount of technical features or official licensing is ever going to change that. Period.

Yet despite an overwhelming urge to dismiss the act of continually turning left for 50 laps as doomed from the outset, we genuinely tried really, really hard to like this game and appreciate it through the eyes of a dedicated American racing fan. With the *IndyCar* licence being such a prestigious US institution, and Codemasters boasting the likes of *Colin McRae* and *TOCA* among its celebrated portfolio of racing titles, surely the outcome couldn't be that bad. Could it?

It does seem that debutant developer Brain In A Jar has pulled out all the stops to bring us the most complete replication of the IndyCar experience to date. Particularly ambitious is the sophisticated AI system that has apparently been honed to ensure your opponents are not only skilled to professional IndyCar standards, but also exhibit the particular traits and tactics attributed to their real-life counterparts. Also, in addition to the standard difficulty settings, the AI will automatically adjust to your performances on the track and deliver a level of competition ideally suited to your abilities.

But here's where we have to remove the rose-tinted glasses and cut to the chase. We've been behind the wheel of quite a few driving games recently and can honestly say this is without a doubt the runt of the litter. The excruciating monotony of circumnavigating the oval tracks is inescapable, and there are few greater recipes for frustration than having to time the same bend to perfection over and over again without a single lapse in concentration. The sad thing is that the racing dynamics are far from awful, and every effort has clearly been made to get the most from the licence. Yet we reckon even the most ardent IndyCar fan stepping into the shoes of their racing idol would still find the fun screeching to a halt not long into the tediously uneventful gameplay.



VERDICT 2/10

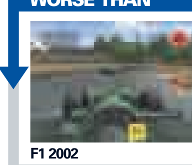
PAINFUL DULLNESS WILL DRIVE YOU ROUND THE BEND

INDIANAPOLIS 500

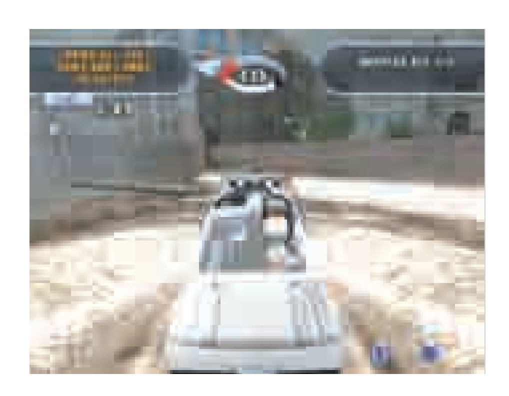


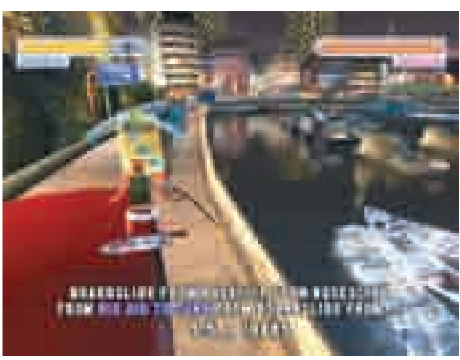
JUST LIKE

WORSE THAN



F1 2002








ARE THERE ANY EXTREME SPORTS LEFT TO DIGITISE NOW?

WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED
FEATURING SHAUN MURRAY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Shaba

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1-2

Skateboarding? Check. BMXing? Check. Inline skating? Check. Hell, even extreme skiing, surfing and mini-scootering have seen the light of day on consoles, albeit in less impressive and enjoyable forms. But what can possibly be left? Short of releasing the world's first bungie-jump-'em-up, developers really are running out of subject matter for extreme sports cash-ins. There are only two options left – do it better or do it different. Luckily, Shaba has the second of these tied up with one of the last untapped resources, wakeboarding. Not an obvious choice, but does it work? Actually, yes…

You might think that a game based on such a linear sport would be rather dull but, in fact, this isn't the case at all. Like the multi-purpose R2 button in Tony Hawk's skating bonanzas, *Wakeboarding Unleashed* has its own miracle button – L2 is your Rope button. A tap while being towed releases the cable and allows you a little hands-free time, and when you're done, another quick press calls for the towrope to be thrown back. This can be used to get to places that the length of the cable would otherwise prohibit or just for showboating purposes – either way, this is the feature that makes the game. Rather impressively, Shaba has attempted to program the rope to be tugged from your grasp should it be snagged by an obstacle. An ambitious feat, but you may notice the word 'attempted' cluttering up the previous sentence. You see, while it works most of the time, the speed of the game and the complicated level design means that your cable does tend to glitch through objects a bit more than we'd like, marring the game's otherwise superb appearance.

And superb is the only word for it. Recently, we've seen a visual renaissance from the PS2 with titles like *Primal*, *Silent Hill 3* and *Enter The Matrix* showcasing a standard of visuals that many would have put past the machine's capabilities a mere six months ago. This watery outing may not quite match these games in terms of graphics but it's quite a close-run contest – *Wakeboarding Unleashed* features some of the nicest water effects and reflections ever to grace a game but, unfortunately, it's not a thorough beauty. Some areas can be rather barren, which makes continuous tricks a little difficult; and with the looped levels, it's not even as if you'll just see the emptiness just once. The music is a mix of primarily alternative and blues tunes. Not the nu-metal or punk we were expecting, but it does work surprisingly well – speeding round the bayou with harmonica and lap-steel in place of pumping beats and blazing guitars makes for a unique experience.

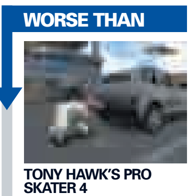
It doesn't take too long to figure out that this game is difficult. Horribly, unbelievably and frustratingly difficult. This isn't so much a criticism as an observation – in our experience, many extreme sports titles suffer from simplicity issues and while it is refreshing to find a game that presents a genuine challenge, maybe turning the

SHAUN PALMER'S PRO SNOWBOARDER



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4



■ No, she's not paragliding… Some of the harder routes to take can send your chosen boarder way into the sky.

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY LEVELS?
The 11 areas (two of which are just arenas) are all surprisingly varied and free, especially given that you're being towed.

Q. REAL PEOPLE?
There are seven real-life wakeboarders to choose from, including the titular Shaun Murray and youngster Dallas Friday.

Q. TWO PLAYER?
Indeed. Four modes cover the usual trick battles as well as some interesting and unique modes like Tug O' War and Co-Op.

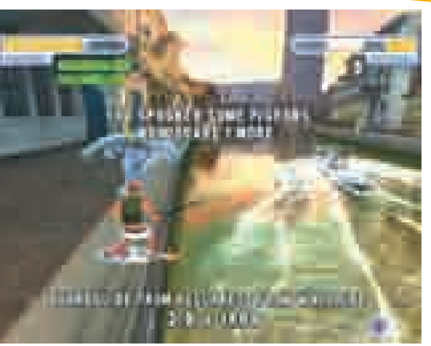


■ The flooded city is a trick fiend's paradise. Good luck trying to grind the helicopter, though.





■ In Tug O' War Mode outperforming the other player lengthens your rope and shortens theirs, making for some interesting face-offs.



■ It's not all scoring big points – like with most similar games, there are plenty of varied tasks to occupy your time.

difficulty up to 11 is taking it a little far. With a few exceptions, each level contains objectives (like beating scores or grinding a certain distance) and challenges (short time limits for quick and tricky tasks) as well as the token gaps to find for those all-important extra points. The main Groove mode works in a similar manner to *Aggressive Inline* – there's no time limit and big tricks give you longer on the water. This is a wonderful system and it works very well here; it's just amazing it isn't more widely employed.

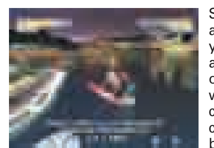
We've managed to get this far without saying just how much fun this game actually is – this is not so much an oversight on our part as a reflection of the game itself. While there are undeniably loads of fun things to do, there's always something that drags the game down at the wrong time. Be it an excruciatingly tricky challenge, a gap that just doesn't want to be nailed or even the pain of being whipped into the wall by a curious manoeuvre from your driver, these few too many glitches just hammer home the one aspect in which the *Tony Hawk* series beats not just this but much of the extreme sports genre – polish. If it weren't for the fact that some areas don't feel quite right, this could have been a truly genre-defining title, but as it stands, *Wakeboarding Unleashed* is an enjoyable alternative to *Tony Hawk* and his extreme brethren and we heartily recommend you check it out.



WIDE OPEN SPACE

Considering the entire premise of the game involves you being towed by a boat, there's an incredible amount of scope for exploration within the game's many and varied areas. As well as being able to release your rope at any time and let momentum lead you to short cuts and alternate routes, certain obstacles actually force the boat to take a score-friendly detour into uncharted waters. These are usually not essential to any of a level's objectives but almost always hold a greater level of trick potential than the standard routes and, as such, are well worth hunting down. Better still are the two-player modes – as well as the usual modes, one ingenious option allows player one to ride the wake while a second player actually drives the boat. This only works on a small selection of the levels but with extra objectives for both driver and rider to complete, this is a welcome inclusion.

XBOX £39.99 OUT NOW



Slightly better visuals and the ability to use your own soundtrack are the only benefits of the Xbox version – we still feel the PS2 controller is better for controlling your board and rider.



Chaos gets bigger every time Dr Robotnik feeds him a Chaos Emerald – but if he's made of water, surely you can just pull the plug on him?



Gambling's a vice – and even long-haired echidnas can succumb to the mindless clinking of slot machines. No, really.



This pesky robot chases Amy wherever she goes, so getting away from it is naturally a priority. Good job the girl carries a giant mallet in her handbag – it comes in ever so handy for bopping him on the head in times of real crisis…

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

CHAO DOWN: You'll find several Chao gardens in which to raise the little creatures. Link up your GBA and you can download them, plus it links up with *Sonic Advance* and *Sonic Advance 2*.

SEGA USES THE GAMECUBE TO INTRODUCE SONIC'S TWO NEW FRIENDS – GLITCHY AND JERKY

SONIC ADVENTURE DX – DIRECTOR'S CUT

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
Sonic Team

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Remaking an old game, especially one that's been improved since its initial release or is a classic that everyone remembers, is not necessarily a bad thing. Of course, the key point is that the remake has to be as good as (if not better than) the original – not only through improved gameplay, but also in terms of graphical and sound quality. Cut corners on these important areas and you might as well have not bothered remaking the game in the first place; a thought that immediately sprang to mind when we first played *Sonic Adventure DX*.

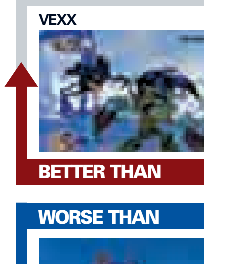
From a purely graphical point of view, SEGA's attempt at a Director's Cut on Sonic's first next-gen outing is disappointing to say the least. For starters, the attempt to bump the frame rate from 30fps to 60fps hasn't worked; the levels judder along and go from 'quite smooth' to 'all over the place' depending on how much action is going on, and the cut-scenes jerk around like crazy. What's more, many of the camera problems that were present in the original haven't been fixed, meaning that you'll still be cursing when you can see where you're going or the camera gets stuck behind a wall. Yes, so Sonic looks a little nicer and some (though not all) of the textures are a little more polished, but that doesn't make up for the decidedly dodgy translation.

It's a pity really, because on the gameplay side, there's more than enough here to keep any *Sonic* fan happy. Essentially, this is a complete remake of the original Dreamcast *Sonic Adventure* (which was reasonably entertaining), combined with a new Mission mode that, while slightly confusing (and locked) at first, soon becomes more enjoyable than the main game as you complete tasks to try and unlock all 12 of the hidden Game Gear titles concealed within.

The fact that such extras exist within *Sonic Adventure DX* is testament to SEGA's commitment to improving its past titles – much like *Skies Of Arcadia Legends* before it, it shows how older titles can be rejuvenated with a bit of thought. Unfortunately, this thoughtfulness didn't extend to the graphics, which ultimately proves detrimental to the complete package. The mix of game styles makes *Sonic Adventure DX* better than *Sonic Adventure 2 Battle* but the actual execution of the whole game brings it down several notches. Shame, really…

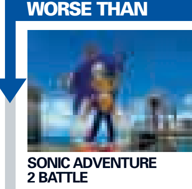
VERDICT 5/10
A BADLY FLAWED PORT OF A STILL RESPECTABLE GAME

VEXX

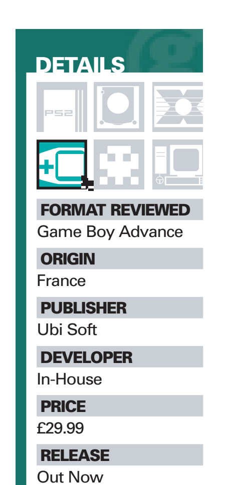


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SONIC ADVENTURE 2 BATTLE



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
France

PUBLISHER
Ubi Soft

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL

IT'S LIKE HAVING A SECRET AGENT IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

It might be an enjoyable experience, but *Splinter Cell* is one hell of a complicated and time-consuming game. With a vast range of items available, an intricate control system and a heavy focus on stealth, it would probably be one of the last games you'd expect to translate well onto the Game Boy Advance. But that hasn't stopped Ubi Soft giving it a go and coming up with a side-scrolling action adventure featuring all the essence of the console versions on a handheld. Did we say side-scrolling? Yes, it's 2D; a perfect excuse for everyone to claim that it'll never work.

It does though; so well, in fact, that we were almost unable to tear ourselves away. Maybe this is because the whole thing emulates the premise of the console versions so well; not only in the fact that you take control of Sam Fisher, but also in the way that the story progress, the places you have to visit and the tasks you have to achieve. It all replicates the world of the console versions pretty much to a tee (or at least, as much of a tee as you'd expect from a 32-bit handheld).

But this is a GBA game we're talking about and, naturally, some elements were lost during the porting process. Sacrifices considered though, the game plays virtually the same as its console forefathers, albeit from a 2D perspective. Fisher still has a wide number of moves at his disposal (including shimmying along pipes, sliding down zip lines and fading into the shadows to evade enemy attention), carries enough weapons and gadgets to equip a small army and is animated as smoothly as anything we've seen on the GBA. He uses night-vision, throws grenades as near or far as you want, knocks out enemies and does almost everything else the 'big' Sam Fisher can do – combine this with some absorbing action and you get exactly what you'd want from a game like this.

We're amazed that GBA *Splinter Cell* is this good. It's almost as if Ubi Soft took the Xbox game and siphoned off all the superfluous elements (like the pretty lighting effects, shadow-casting and highly detailed graphics) until all that was left was the GBA version. Don't believe us? You will if you play it…

VERDICT 8/10
A FINE ACHIEVEMENT FOR A GBA TITLE

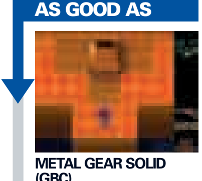
TOMB RAIDER: THE PROPHECY



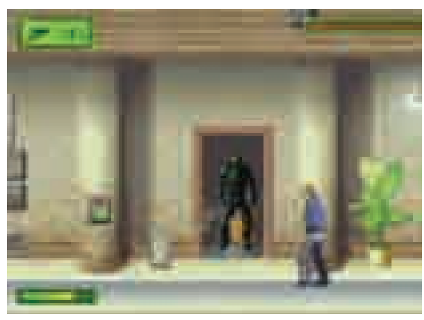
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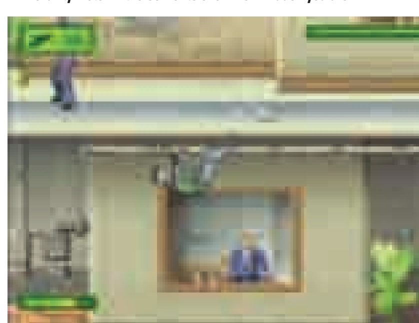
AS GOOD AS



METAL GEAR SOLID (GBC)



Standing in the shadows is essential to avoid being spotted – there's a Visibility meter in the corner to show how hidden you are.



Stealth is the key here – if you get caught, the alarm will go off.



You can use Sam's Sticky Camera to survey the local area, scope out guards and even see where the security cameras are looking.

RESIDENT EVIL: DEAD AIM

BETTER TO SHOOT FIRST, THEN ASK QUESTIONS LATER…

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

It's an equation you'd have thought every employee at Umbrella Inc would have learnt by now: leaked virus + contained location full of people = one hell of a mess. Still, it's happened again (this time on a luxury ocean liner belonging to Umbrella) and, once more, it's your job to explore every inch of the place, solve numerous puzzles and take out zombies whenever the need arises. Unsurprisingly, it's pretty standard *Resident Evil* fare… except for the fact that this one's played with a lightgun, of course.

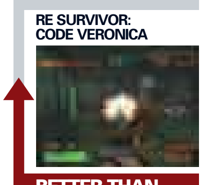
A lightgun, you say? Yes indeed – although the third-person screenshots might say otherwise, *RE: Dead Aim* is part of the 'good idea, but rather disappointing' series that was *Resident Evil: Survivor*. Thankfully, Capcom finally appears to have got it right; while previous *RE: Survivor* titles failed to capture the *Resident Evil* spark, *RE: Dead Aim* does it by basically adding lightgun elements to the original game's structure (rather than the other way around).

It's a pretty simple concept – you can roam around in the third-person viewpoint as either Bruce MacGavin or another mysterious female agent by using the D-pad and buttons on the G-Con 2. Should you need to blast a zombie or two, just pull the trigger once to enter first-person lightgun mode and fire away. It works, although the controls can prove either fiddly or lacklustre depending on what you're using; the G-Con 2 wasn't designed as a controller, but the pad doesn't offer the same feeling that a lightgun does for the shooting sections. Also, although it's necessary due to the lightgun element, there are just too many zombies around to create anything other than a shooting gallery-style atmosphere – *Resident Evil* games are famous for their scare factor, but there's hardly any of that here.

Certainly, *RE: Dead Aim* represents the pinnacle of the *RE: Survivor* series so far – particularly against the incredibly shallow gameplay of the previous titles. Unfortunately, the abundance of zombies and slightly clumsy gameplay does mean that *RE: Dead Aim* still lacks that unique spark that makes all *Resident Evil* games as frightening as they are. If you fancy a survival horror game without too much horror then by all means buy it; somehow though, we suspect that's not why these games sell in the long run.

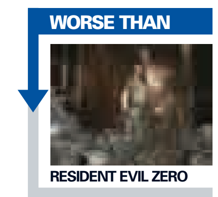
VERDICT 6/10
THE BEST YET, BUT STILL LACKING IN ATMOSPHERE

RE SURVIVOR: CODE VERONICA



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



RESIDENT EVIL ZERO

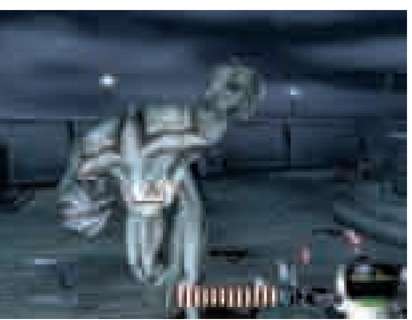


It's the worst situation to be in – an advancing zombie horde and no bullets in your gun. Surely standing still isn't going to help?

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
ROAM AROUND: The ideal combination – free-roaming *RE* action with zombie-packed lightgun fun.
IT TAKES TWO: Playing as two different characters gives you a wider range of weaponry.



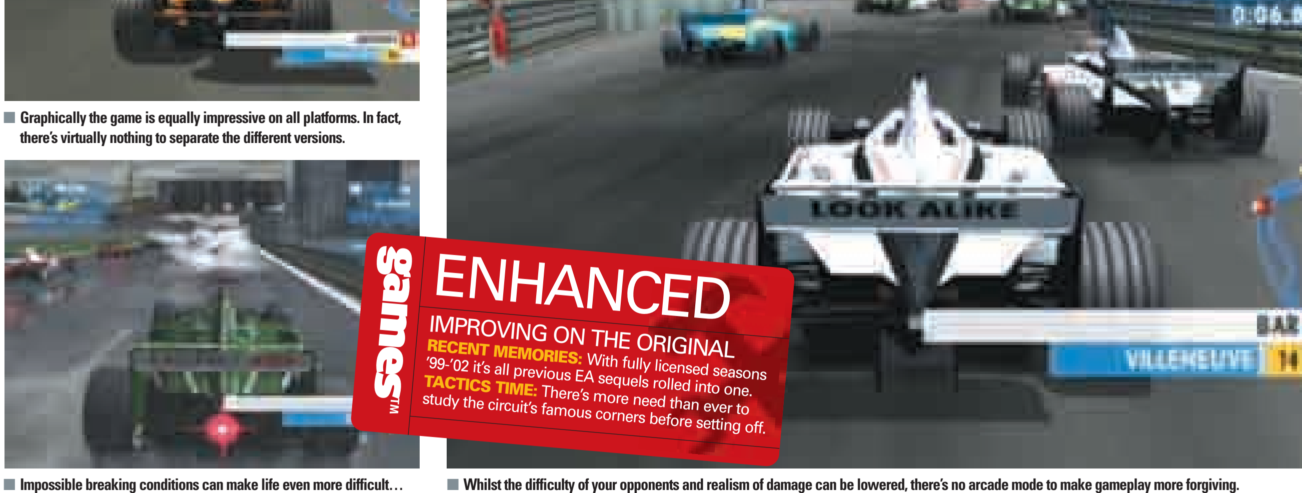
Forget wondering what's around the corner, the Umbrella boat is literally teeming with zombies in every single corridor.



This being a *Resident Evil* game, it's only to be expected that a number of familiar faces make an appearance – deadly Hunters, anyone?



Graphically the game is equally impressive on all platforms. In fact, there's virtually nothing to separate the different versions.



Impossible breaking conditions can make life even more difficult…

Whilst the difficulty of your opponents and realism of damage can be lowered, there's no arcade mode to make gameplay more forgiving.

IF YOU WANT THE GLORY OF BEING AN F1 DRIVER, BOY WILL YOU HAVE TO EARN IT…

F1 CAREER CHALLENGE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC, GC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
EA

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Once again it's time for motor racing fans to make that annual decision of whether or not to invest in EA's latest instalment in the *F1* series. But those expecting to see *F1 2003* sometime soon are in for a shock, as in a stroke of marketing genius this year's upgrade has instead been entitled *F1 Career Challenge*. With all the connotations of added depth implied by the title, does this game really offer more than the sprinkling of enhancements typical of EA sporting sequels?

The most obvious addition to the regular *F1* concept is the Career mode, which allows players to join a less reputable racing team at the start of the '99 season and work their way through the ranks over the next four years. Further to advancing your driving career by growing in reputation, you will also accumulate points for achieving respectable finishing positions and even for negotiating corners faultlessly. These points can then be exchanged for useful bonuses such as perfect pit stops, or luxury items like new helmets and pit babes.

The fully licensed drivers, teams and cars from the past four racing seasons are also available to select for single races, ensuring the game isn't limited by the appeal of this year's line-ups and again offers more than your standard EA upgrade. This instalment in the series also takes a notably giant leap forward in the visual department and the striking photo-realism on all platforms is bound to become one of the game's biggest draws. Overall, *F1CC* delivers the most realistic simulation of the F1 experience to date and we're convinced there has never been a better reason for fans of the series to update.

Yet as much as we'd recommend this title to fans of EA's previous *F1* outings, the average gamer should approach with caution. In the 'fun/realism' trade-off, *F1CC* certainly puts realism at the top of its agenda. The art of precision control must be mastered before this game becomes anything but infuriating, and the potential for multiplayer enjoyment is limited unless your mates are equally budding professionals. While *F1CC* delivers a complex F1 driving sim in style, those wanting a playable, entertaining and varied racer have every right to be sorely disappointed – and even dedicated fans of the sport may be divided by the inaccessible gameplay.



VERDICT 6/10
A REAL LOOKER, BUT AN ACQUIRED TASTE



RISE OF NATIONS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Big Huge Games

PRICE
£34.99

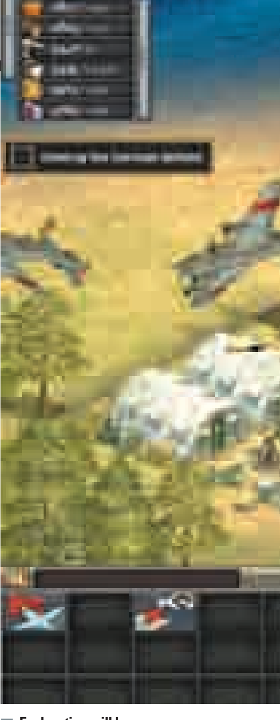
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

MINIMUM SPEC
600MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 800MB HDD space, 16MB 3D graphics card

STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK THEIR BONES, BUT TANKS AND BOMBS BREAK NATIONS…





Each nation will have a range of unique units at their disposal as the ages progress, such as this devastating British fleet of Lancaster Bombers. Chocks away…

As you might expect from a developer called Big Huge Games, *Rise Of Nations* is no lightweight. In fact, as gaming concepts go, they don't come much more epic than this. The latest brainchild of *Civilization II* designer Brian Reynolds, *RON* fuses the sizeable enough task of conquering the world with a sprawling journey of societal development through the ages. Primarily a real-time strategy affair, it adds a whole new level of depth to the tried and tested *Age Of Empires* formula by allowing players to build a powerful nation as well advance their civilisation through the entirety of history.

While the Single Battle mode allows for progression from ancient times through to the information age within one epic RTS scenario, the crux of the game comes from undertaking a much more gradual trek through the eras in the massive Conquer The World campaign. Players choose to control any of the 18 empires on offer and begin the game from their appropriate home nation. The subsequent quest for world domination follows a turn-based system reminiscent of the classic board game Risk, yet the battles resulting from each move are actually played out in an RTS scenario. For instance, the Roman empire is based in Italy and will initially have the option to move into the adjacent unclaimed territory of the Alps or Balkans by land, venture south to the shores of Africa and claim the Sahara province, or, least advisably, invade Greece to the east.

As with the *Civilization* series, your allies must be chosen wisely, and striking up a friendship with the Greeks early on could provide some much needed support for the Roman empire in conflicts with Europe's many other aspiring empires. Invading unclaimed territory will usually cause a stir with the locals, and the resulting RTS scenario

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS...



MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

Each historical period has its own style, and your tactical approach to battle must evolve with the technology available.







ALL THE SMALL THINGS

Okay, so the traditional isometric viewpoint *Rise Of Nations* uses to depict the action may lack the 3D perspective of certain other games in the genre, but that certainly doesn't mean the game isn't a looker. Animation of the beautifully rendered characters and unit models particularly livens up the screen, and the attention to detail is often quite remarkable. Along with the more obvious changes to architectural style and combat units as you advance through the ages, even the most intricate elements of your civilisation will accordingly progress. In fact, you'd do well to even notice how the logging techniques of your woodcutters gradually become more mechanised over history, and the construction methods your citizens use to build new structures will similarly evolve.

FAQs

Q. SPECIAL UNITS?
Each culture has unique units, like Germany's ancient Barbarians and modern Tiger Tanks.

Q. PEACEFUL SOLUTIONS?
Increasing the power of your nation and broadening its borders needn't always involve armed conflict.

Q. KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE?
In Conquer The World mode, your allies will join you in battle if they're in the area.

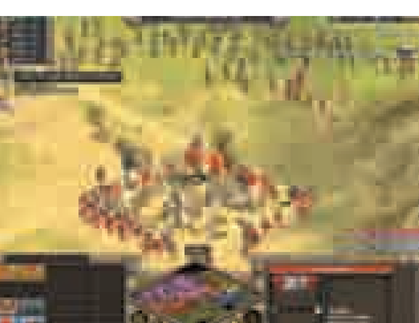
games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
YOUR OWN RULES: All the options for tailoring the single-player battle scenarios are available in multiplayer.
ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES: Choose from 18 nations, 16 maps and stage your battle in any historical era.

may have you defending your newly founded settlement against rebellious attacks. The battle sections take place on appropriate terrain for the geographical location – if you were to attempt an invasion of Britain, for example, you'd find the English Channel standing between your mainland Europe position and old Blighty on the RTS map.

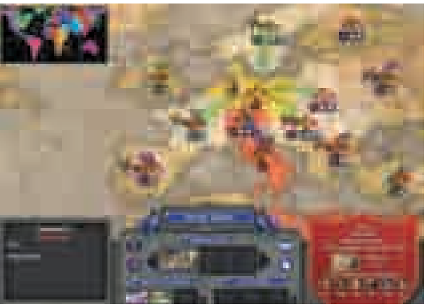
The campaign begins with all nations in the ancient age of civilisation and, whatever the objectives of the specific scenario, will typically give you a capital city surrounded by a couple of farms and a woodcutting operation in order to provide the food and wood you'll need to start building your nation. Unlike most RTS games, however, stockpiling resources and researching new capabilities in *RON* isn't simply a means of putting together your military force. Other key areas at the heart of your society's development are advancements in commercial, scientific and civic knowledge. Of course, a powerful army is crucial to defend your expanding cities, but only by creating a productive society and running the technological race faster than the enemy will your empire be ready to face the more demanding hostile situations.

When it does come down to fisticuffs, the combat dynamics and AI strategies are among the best we've seen in the genre. Most notable is how the art of war changes so dramatically as you advance through the ages. *RON* excels in depicting the mass battlefield confrontations of the dark ages, the seafaring invasions of new lands, and eventually today's distanced dependency on air raids and missiles. The variety of strategy involved in battles across the eight epochs of civilisation is superb, and experiencing the replacement of arrows with gunpowder or the transition from horseback to mechanical vehicles makes for a truly epic voyage. When you're nuking bordering nations from the comfort of your own capital, it can be pretty rewarding to think back a few hours to when you were just a small farming community defended by a bunch of simpletons with slingshots…

Even in the single battles, the underlying *Civilization*-esque context makes *RON* by far one of the most wholesome RTS titles we've ever played. Those who want to fully immerse themselves in everything this game has to offer will find an endless complement of things to do and strategic directions to explore. However, the fully customisable scenarios also allow the less patient strategist to defer their more complex responsibilities and enjoy *RON* simply as a top-notch battle sim. Even better, since the action can be staged during any historical period, or over a specified range of eras, this game really can be anything you want it to be. Whether you're after the engrossing depth of *Civilization* in real-time, or simply want an RTS title that offers ancient, Napoleonic and WW2 warfare in the one package, *Rise Of Nations* will grant the wishes of rookies and seasoned campaigners alike.



Make the establishment of a thriving economy the priority and your nation will produce enough resources to quickly amass a great army.



Everybody wants to rule the world, and empires beginning their bid for conquests in Europe will find fierce competition from all directions.



VERDICT 9/10
TOP OF THE RTS PILE FOR VARIETY AND DEPTH

■ There's some variation in context along the way – such as teaming up with this squad of US Marines.

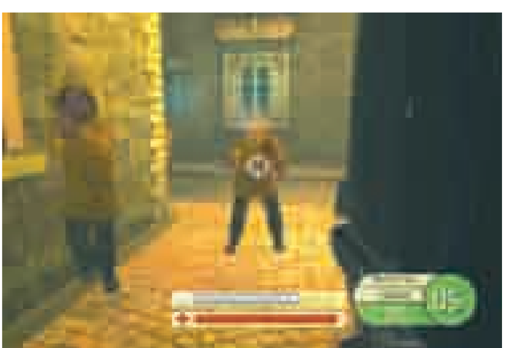




■ Sure, he'll die in a glistening pool of blood but come back to this room and he'll have mysteriously vanished. Ooh, spooky.



■ Oh my god, we killed Kenny… Actually it's just the cagouled assassins you'll have to dispose of in the first Prague mission.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Gratuitous Games

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
20 June

PLAYERS
1 (Up to 10 Live)

SOLDIER

games™ GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

NEW GROUND: Use randomly generated arenas to outwit smart-arses who've learnt the standard maps.

WATCH 'EM BLEED: Localised body damage means you'll see your mates suffer in full detail.

■ There's nothing we like better than a good zoom on our sniper scope, and in *SOFII* you can really see the mess you make.

FAQs

Q. TIPTOES ALL THE WAY?
Raising the alarm in the poorly designed stealth sections won't mean instant failure as it did on the PC.

Q. TOOLS OF THE TRADE?
Add a silencer to your SOCOM, or kit yourself out with an M4 machine gun for a more Rambo-esque approach.

Q. GORE FACTOR?
Limbs are torn apart by your bullets, and pieces of brain can be splattered all over the walls.

It seems that any FPS wanting to be taken seriously these days must incorporate some kind of ragdoll technology, or face ridicule as we watch our slain enemies fall in a laughably unconvincing heap thanks to the limitations of pre-scripted death animations.** But when *Soldier Of Fortune II* was released on the PC a year ago, such brutal realism had yet to become the norm and by depicting the consequences of our violent acts in full graphic detail, the title had a shocking but strangely captivating selling point.

At the heart of the game lies the GHOUL 2 localised damage system developed by Raven for the original PC version, which provokes a realistic response from the body parts your bullets actually hit. Along with these accurate physical reactions to every shot, the flesh torn apart by your gunshots is illustrated to a similar – if slightly exaggerated – degree of stomach-wrenching clarity, giving the game its rather twisted 'wow' factor. Of course, developers behind such graphic realism tend to emphasise the technology's intentions are to make us think twice about taking a human life, but something tells us Gratuitous Games would admit, along with the rest of us, to the immense satisfaction a good splashing of claret adds to proceedings.

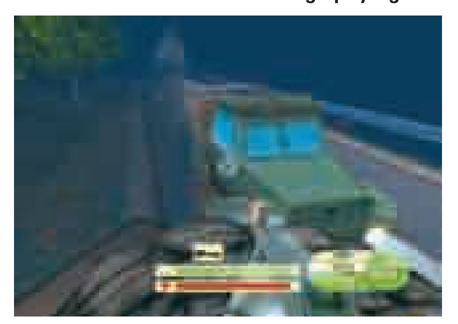
polish doesn't even begin to describe the ridiculously primitive visuals that make a mockery of the Xbox's true graphical capabilities.

While much effort has obviously gone into ensuring wounds are depicted in their full gory glory, the rest of the screen is awash with some of the most poorly rendered and generally bland backdrops we've seen since the pre-*GoldenEye* era. Even the flagship localised damage system is sorely hampered by the embarrassingly unfinished collision detection, which sees just about every fallen bad guy getting his polygons absurdly tangled with the environment. Here, the crucial inferiority to today's ragdoll technology becomes fatally apparent – you'll spend more time cursing the tendency for dead bodies to have their limbs disappear through a wall than marvelling at the occasional flashes of realism. And with such detailed anatomical mapping of character models for the purpose of damage animation, how hard would it have been to get their lips to move when they talk or make them walk convincingly along the ground rather than floating above it?

We aren't usually too concerned about the way a game looks unless it adds something quite special to the gaming experience, but *SOFII*'s sub-standard appearance completely overshadows

THE NEVER-ENDING STORY…

Once you've trawled through the 55 single-player missions, there's no need to hang up your AK74. With an infinite number of randomly generated missions on offer, a mercenary's work is never done. Maps can be automatically generated and filled with randomly placed bad guys, allowing players to enjoy yet more blood-soaked outings amidst some horribly dull backdrops. Furthermore, plugging into Xbox Live lets up to 10 combatants battle it out in a variety of multiplayer modes. Although we didn't get to sample the delights of the Live experience due to problems with *SOFII*'s UK servers, the graphic depiction of violence might just liven up the online manhunts a good deal more than it could the single-player game.



OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX

OR 'HOW TO EXPOSE A TERRORISM RACKET, ALONG WITH THE INNARDS OF ANYONE WHO GETS IN YOUR WAY'

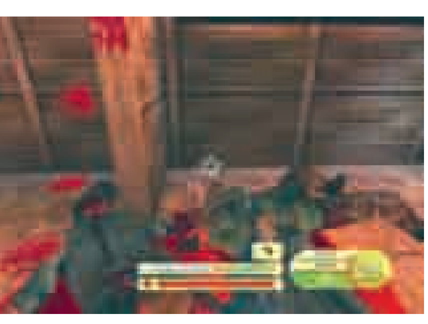
The impact of these realistic fatalities is complemented by the real-world context in which the game takes place. Rather than diluting the effect of the violence by having you blasting the limbs off some alien with your plasma rifle, you'll be mutilating your fellow man using actual weapons in a series of familiar global locations. Players step into the boots of real-life mercenary and former Green Beret John Mullins, who consulted on the project with detailed accounts of his experience in the field. The story follows Mullins' work for secret anti-terrorist organisation 'The Shop', as he's sent behind enemy lines to investigate a particularly nasty chemical weapons threat.

Of course, all this amounts to is a fairly basic shooter that sees our gun-toting maverick going from A to B riddling a variety of unsavoury types with bullets along the way. The ultra-violent slant to this standard FPS model may sound like a pretty solid premise for some entertaining action, but don't rush out to your local games store just yet. You see, despite all its appetising potential, in reality *SOFII* serves up thoroughly disappointing fayre. A lack of some otherwise bearable gameplay. Controlling Mullins is intuitive and responsive, and you'll soon be aiming for specific body parts to achieve the most dramatic effects from your onslaught. AI is pretty commendable too, with enemies readily taking cover and making particularly good use of grenades to flush you out of safe positions. Other seemingly irrelevant elements – such as user-friendly ladders that won't see you plummeting to your death should you fail to align your descent with pinpoint accuracy – combine to lay the foundations of an altogether playable shooter.

But despite these reasonably solid basics and a generous helping of explicit violence to help spice things up, *SOFII* is a severely lacking title that falls well short of the spectacle it could have been.

VERDICT 4/10

PRIMITIVE AND DULL, BUT PLAYABLE IN SMALL DOSES



Being a gun-for-hire can be a messy job at times, but then you knew that when you signed up, didn't you, soldier?

POSTAL 2

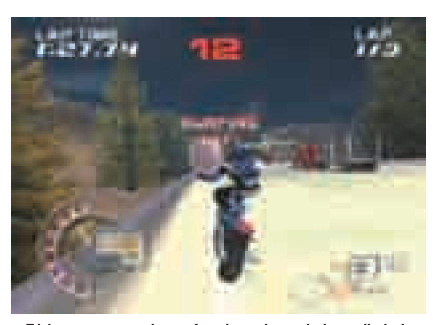


BETTER THAN

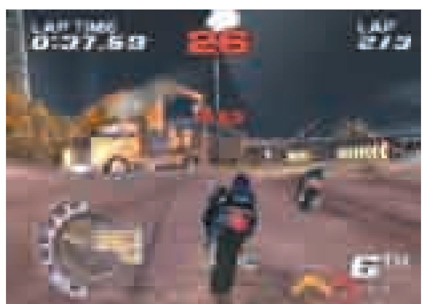
WORSE THAN



RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN



Tricks are easy enough to perform, but acting cocky is usually the best way to get a face full of lorry.



A truck unloading logs can only be an accident waiting to happen.



As if your own driving wasn't dangerous enough, the streets are full of idiot motorists.

games™ FINGERPRINT

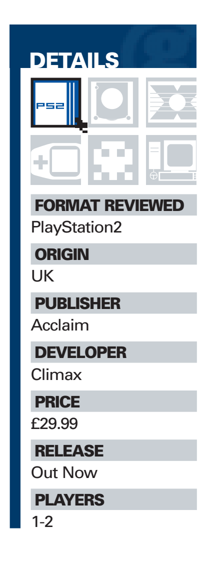
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

SHOW OFF: Bonus bikes can be unlocked by pulling off specified tricks during a race

'OUCH' FACTOR: High-speed collisions are far more entertaining when you're on two wheels.

SPEED KINGS

WHAT DO YOU GET IF YOU CROSS BURNOUT WITH A BUNCH OF 600CC SUPERBIKES?



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Acclaim

DEVELOPER
Climax

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

When Acclaim – publisher of the superb *Burnout 2* – got together with Climax – developer of the impressive Xbox *Moto GP* series – their lovechild was always going to be dubbed '*Burnout* on bikes'. But *Speed Kings* doesn't just replace the traditional racetrack setting with treacherous city streets – additional elements such as stunts, rewards for driving dangerously, and *Road Rash*-style combat have been added to create some truly high-octane arcade action. But with such an array of extra features, does bigger really mean better or is it simply a mish-mash of mediocrity?

The action itself is set firmly in the arcade racing vein, providing players with an exhilarating high-speed experience and some overly forgiving vehicle handling. The focus is definitely on fun here and, unlike the more serious racers where a couple of mistakes will guarantee you won't be seeing the leading pack again, even after a handful of complete wipe-outs a spot of careful driving should soon have you back in contention. Unfortunately, the flipside to that coin means you're never able to really pull away from opponents when you lead the field yourself.

Despite the game's lenience and accessibility, contending with traffic and environmental incidents ensures players are kept on their toes. A lorry shedding its load will test your dodging and weaving skills, crossing trains must be jumped, and passing beneath a felled tree involves a well-timed sliding manoeuvre. While the whole street-racing context spices things up nicely, the collection of other features fails to make much impact on the gaming experience. In the main game, performing tricks and driving dangerously charges a useful boost meter, and the ability to attack challenging opponents can also come in handy, but neither element really feels integral to gameplay.

The spattering of potentially fun extras seem thrown together without managing to gel and lift the game as a whole, but they do fill out the basics enough to entertain. Far from being the *Moto GP* with bells on many may have hoped for, *Speed Kings* lacks the depth to absorb players for long and its abundance of features doesn't quite compensate for this. For a short burst of single or multiplayer arcade action the game delivers well, but with the likes of *Burnout 2* for competition in the street racing stakes we'd reach for its four-wheeled counterpart every time.



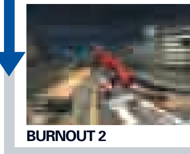
VERDICT 6/10

ENTERTAINING, BUT DOESN'T QUITE MAKE THE PODIUM



MOTO GP 3

BETTER THAN



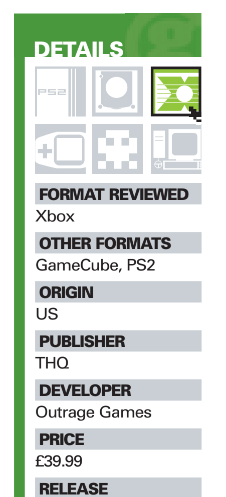
WORSE THAN

BURNOUT 2

RED FACTION II

NOW ON XBOX AND GAMECUBE. PLEASE, TRY TO CONTAIN YOURSELVES

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
GameCube, PS2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Outrage Games

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

So let's get this straight – you released an average shooter last year for PS2, it did averagely well at retail against little competition, but now you're going to port it to two more powerful systems and put it up against the likes of *Halo* and *TimeSplitters 2*? Logic would suggest that this probably wouldn't be the smartest move in the world unless a hell of a port was planned – alas, this is not the case. Line up, then, for another churn-'em-out conversion that attempts to pass off a little graphical update as a full overhaul of the game. Any takers?

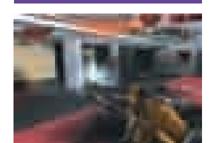
Bar a slight upgrade in the visual stakes, *Red Faction II* is just another average resident of Port City. Control, as you'd imagine, isn't an issue on the slightly chunkier controller since button counts are identical, but you just can't help noticing the fact that this doesn't belong on the Xbox. We know ports can be done well – *Burnout 2* and *Conflict: Desert Storm* have both recently been granted new life in style, but *Red Faction II* can't hold a candle to its enhanced superiors. No 5.1 audio, no link-up play… in fact, nothing of any note is new over the PS2 game of last year at all. Convinced yet?

As a game, *Red Faction II* is the epitome of mediocrity. From the hackneyed plot to the generic enemies, weapons and locales, everything on offer just serves to conjure up blank expressions and blasé reactions. Admittedly, if you break down *Halo* you could say much the same but at least in Bungie's seminal shooter the elements actually gel and work together; something not entirely true of *Red Faction II*.

So what exactly do you get for your hard-earned £40? Stacks of virtual explosives, a badly-implemented Geo-Mod system that selectively allows you to blow up your surroundings and a generally disappointing port of a distinctly average game. There's some raw animal pleasure to be had from blasting hundreds of anonymous soldiers to pieces with whatever flavour of high explosives you stumble across (it's the only way – they gobble up bullets in a decidedly unfair manner), but after that wears off, you're left little choice but to save and give up for the day or wade through a seemingly unlimited slew of faceless foes. This is far from the worst example of the genre, but as ports go, they don't come much less inspiring.

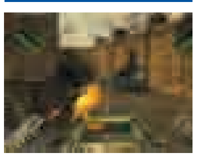
VERDICT 4/10
EVEN LESS IMPRESSIVE SECOND TIME AROUND

GAMECUBE £39.99



More of the same, obviously. The pad doesn't fare too well compared to the others but the game is nigh-on identical.

PS2 £39.99



Slightly ropier graphics but the same game at heart. Officially still full price, but hunt around and you'll easily find it for half that.

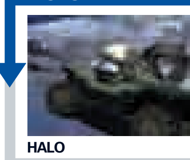
TUROK EVOLUTION



BETTER THAN



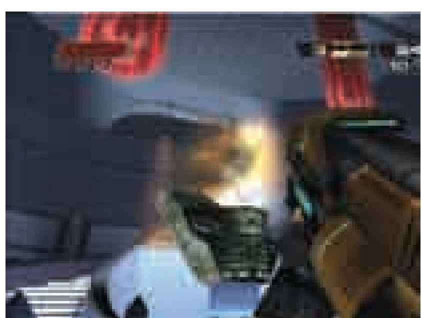
WORSE THAN



HALO



Ah, zombies – the staple diet of every game designer who can't think of anything new.



Geo-Mod in all its 'Look, it's actually working for once' glory. Isn't breaking stuff fun?



You don't get to drive the tank this time around, but you do get to play with the heavy weaponry. Which is almost as good.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
FOUR PORTS: A Multi-tap is no longer required to sample the dismal multiplayer modes.
MR SHEEN: A little cleaning up here and there is as far as the graphical makeover goes.



A girl, a raccoon and a giant nut? Sounds like a party… **Pocky And Rocky SNES [Natsume] 1993**




eMag



RETRO
MICRO GAMES AC
A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.7 JUNE 2003
00p
MARIO KART
THE GREATEST GAME EVER?
AFTER BURNER
WORTHY OF AN OSCAR?
PARODIUS
GREAT GAME BOSSES
GOEMON
THE LEGEND OF
THE MYSTICAL
NINJA FAMILY TREE
STREETS OF RAGE
Will SEGA Ever Resurrect
This Classic Series?
Atari 2600 VCS
The Classic Console Of The Eighties
Plus Classic Gaming Ads!
CODEMASTERS
AN IN-DEPTH DEVELOPER HISTORY
WE GO BEHIND THE
SCENES WITH CEO
DAVID DARLING

RETRO NEWS

FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE HERE AND NOW OF RETRO GAMING...

Many of the titles on show at this year's E3 were either sequels or remakes of classic games. *Sonic Heroes*, for example, wouldn't exist if *Sonic The Hedgehog* hadn't appeared on the Mega Drive 12 years ago, and it's hard to believe the *Gran Turismo* series is six years old. Bizarrely, the first *Sonic* game still looks okay, while *Gran Turismo*'s visuals are rather dated. Of course, it could be argued that 2D was fairly advanced by the time *Sonic* was released, compared to *Gran Turismo*, which was developed during the early days of polygon-enabled consoles.

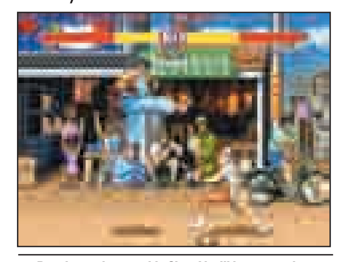
Of course, this raises the question – when does a game become retro? With many older PS2 titles already looking out-of-date, it's hard to see them as current. By contrast, *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos* (SNK's new fighter) looks great, despite running on 14-year-old technology. Perhaps it's more accurate to call games like these reproductions – new titles that refer to old ones. In which case the term retro takes on a far wider meaning...

Keith Edwards, Retro Editor

MANY HAPPY RETURNS

With the original *Street Fighter* launched in 1987 and *Street Fighter II* coming out in 1991, we're a little confused as to why Capcom is celebrating *Street Fighter*'s fifteenth birthday this year.The company has already announced that a selection of commemorative merchandise will be available to buy from www.capcom.co.jp/sf15th and that much of the original *Street Fighter* concept art will be going on show at an art gallery in Tokyo.

However, it's the rumour that a celebratory *Street Fighter* game may be in development at Capcom's Japanese headquarters that particularly interests us. Word has it the company has openly discussed the project with members of the Japanese press, though Capcom Europe was decidedly more coy about the subject when we spoke to them, saying: "It's been almost 15 years since *Street Fighter II* was released, so there are likely to be a few rumours flying around. However, there's nothing confirmed at present." Let's just hope that something does get sorted soon.



▲ Despite getting on a bit, Chun Li still has an ageless beauty. And, er, so does Ryu.



▲ Capcom is celebrating *Street Fighter*'s fifteenth birthday a year late. Curious...

NEW FOR OLD

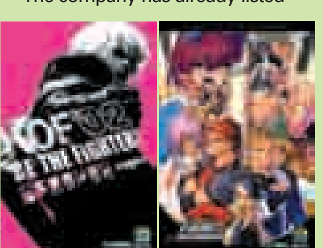
SNK rises from the ashes, bringing with it some exciting new titles

When Japanese developer Playmore bought the rights to SNK's intellectual property in 2001, everyone thought that was the end for the company behind the Neo-Geo. However, Playmore has now not only confirmed a selection of new games (for current and retro formats), but also that a new American division – SNK Neo Geo USA – will be handling the company's upcoming titles outside Japan.

The company has already listed four titles for release in America – *King Of Fighters 2001* and *2002* for the PS2, plus *Metal Slug 4* and *Rage Of The Dragons* for Neo-Geo AES. Perhaps most exciting, however, is the news that *Metal Slug 5* (which will continue the series in the style of the four previous titles), *Metal Slug 3D* and a brand new *Samurai Shodown* game are in development.

But while details on most of SNK's upcoming titles are scarce, it did unveil one fantastic new project at E3. *SNK VS. Capcom Chaos* is a completely separate game to *SNK VS. Capcom*. Running on SNK's 14-year-old Neo-Geo MVS arcade board, the game takes fighting back to the basic one-on-one way of doing things, and looks to have more in common with *Street Fighter 3* or *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* than any of the current batch of versus games. With 20 characters already confirmed (ten from SNK and ten from Capcom), plus the possibility of more being added before its summer arcade release, *SVC Chaos* should also be ported to Xbox and PS2, giving retro fighting fans plenty to get their 2D teeth into.

▶ *SNK Vs. Capcom Chaos* uses the Neo-Geo MVS arcade board, which is good news for retro fans.



▲ *King Of Fighters 2002* and *Rage Of The Dragons* should provide plenty of Neo-Geo-style beat-'em-up fun.





The summer of '96 would have been the typical dry season for the games industry if it hadn't been for Nintendo and the Japanese release of the N64. Many gamers had already bowed to Sony's marketing and bought a PlayStation, but the ones who were still awaiting the arrival of Nintendo's next console would finally get a taste of the much-delayed hardware this month.

JAPAN'S BEST SELLING VIDEOGAMES FOR 1996

1: *Pocket Monster* (*Red, Blue, Green*)
Game Boy – 1,663,861 (units)
2: *Tekken 2*
PlayStation – 1,079,585
3: *Super Mario RPG*
Super Famicom – 995,898
4: *Biohazard* (*Resident Evil*)
PlayStation – 942,987
5: *Derby Stallion '96*
Super Famicom – 903,200
6: *Super Mario 64*
Nintendo 64 – 890,749
7: *Dragon Quest III* (remake)
Super Famicom – 719,886
8: *Arc The Lad II*
PlayStation – 672,420
9: *Tobal No. 1*
PlayStation – 657,816
10: *Dragon Quest VI*
Super Famicom – 599,335

UK CHARTS FOR JUNE 1996

1: Three Lions (Official Song Of The England Team)
Skinner & Baddiel and The Lightning Seeds
2: Mysterious Girl
Peter Andre Feat. Bubbler Ranx
3: Killing Me Softly
Fugees
4: Because You Loved Me
Celine Dion
5: Nobody Knows
Tony Rich Project
6: Ooh Aah… Just A Little Bit
Gina G
7: Don't Stop Movin'
Livin' Joy
8: The Day We Caught The Train
Ocean Colour Scene
9: Always Be My Baby
Mariah Carey
10: There's Nothing I Won't Do
JX

GAMING NEWS JUNE 96

Nintendo finally releases its 64-bit console in Japan

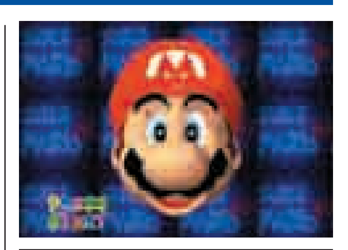
On Sunday 23 June, 1996, Nintendo finally unleashed its N64 console on the Japanese public. Although the system was supposed to launch in 1995, a lack of completed software had forced the company to delay the release of the hardware until April 1996.

Unfortunately, even that wasn't long enough for Shigeru Miyamoto to put the finishing touches to his latest *Mario* game, and seeing as the success of the machine depended solely on the quality of the Italian plumber's first 3D outing, Nintendo had no choice but to hold back the launch for a further two months.

However, it wasn't just in-house software that had been plaguing Nintendo in the months prior to the launch of N64 – third-party developers had also been struggling to come to terms with its powerful, yet unnecessarily flawed architecture.

While Sony and even SEGA had already embraced CD-Rom technology, Nintendo's decision to stick with good old cartridges (believing them to be more resistant to piracy) had annoyed some developers – mostly Squaresoft (*Final Fantasy*) and Capcom (*Resident Evil*), who were already enjoying the creative freedom that CDs allowed.

As a direct result of Nintendo's lack of vision in this area, the company inadvertently lost some of the most important franchises around to its cool new rival, Sony.



▶ Want to know why the N64 was delayed? Blame this guy – if he wasn't great, the machine would flop…

Even so, the Japanese launch of N64 was an undisputed success, with a reported 300,000 hardware units selling on the first day alone, and almost as many copies of *Super Mario 64*. Unsurprisingly, only a handful of consoles made it to the UK due to the massive demand in Japan, which resulted in importers charging as much as £700 for them.

To make matters worse, the system didn't support RGB, and with a choice of either composite (for those with NTSC televisions) or dodgy PAL converters, the picture quality was truly awful. But with games as good as *Super Mario 64* and *Pilot Wings 64* available from day one, those who were lucky enough to get their hands on a system over the launch period were hardly going to complain about the visuals, now were they?

WORLD NEWS

BOMB ATTACK ON MANCHESTER SHOCKS THE UK

On Saturday June 15 more than 200 people were injured when a bomb exploded in central Manchester. Police believed the attack was the work of the IRA, which had broken its ceasefire four months previously. A local television station had received a tip-off at around 10.30 that morning, and the police were investigating a suspect van outside Marks & Spencer when the device exploded just an hour and 20 minutes later.



The area was still being cleared as the bomb went off, and though most of the shoppers had already been moved out of range, many bystanders were injured . Seven people required surgery, including a pregnant woman who was thrown nearly five metres into the air. The police later made a statement in which they said "it's an absolute miracle that no-one has been killed".



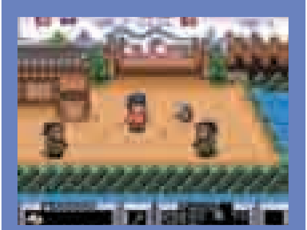
GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT...

THIS MONTH'S FAVOURITES

Just a few of the timeless retro titles that have been stealing hours from our busy schedule this month…

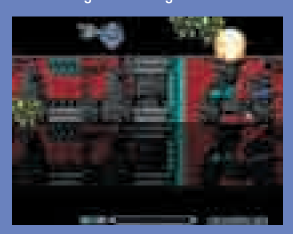
GANBARE GOEMON (SNES)

Konami's *Goemon* series (or *Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* as it's known over here) remains a true platform/RPG classic to this day, despite being very much ignored by Western gamers.



R-TYPE III: THE THIRD LIGHTNING (SNES)

Since playing the preview version of *R-Type Final* we've had enormous amounts of fun looking back across the whole series – especially with this almost forgotten little gem.



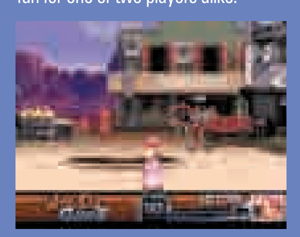
SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO (ARCADE)

Although many gamers remember *SFII Turbo* as the best game in the *SFII* series, we believe that *Super SFII Turbo* might just beat it. It's those Super moves, you see. We love 'em.



WILD GUNS (SNES)

A mixture of Wild West and sci-fi themes may seem an unlikely blend, but Natsume managed to pull it off in this brilliant SNES shoot-'em-up. Great fun for one or two players alike.



W•O•N•D•E•R B•O•Y I•N M•O•N•S•T•E•R W•O•R•L•D

THE MEGA DRIVE MAY HAVE BEEN PREFERRED BY HARD KIDS WHO DIDN'T 'DO' CUTE. BUT SEGA'S MACHINE HAD ITS SHARE OF BIG-EYED MOPPETS…

Format: **SEGA Mega Drive**
Developer: **SEGA**
Publisher: **SEGA**
Released: **1991**

With so many *Wonder Boy* and *Monster World* titles released across too many formats to mention, it's easy to get confused as to which is which – especially when you consider that many of the Japanese versions were released under alternative names. In fact, *Wonder Boy In Monster World* on the Mega Drive was possibly the most confusing of all, seeing as the Japanese version was entitled *Wonder Boy V: Monster World III* when it was released in October 1991.

Of course, the series is probably best known just as *Wonder Boy* – a basic side-scrolling arcade adventure with garishly vibrant graphics, a generic character and simplistic gameplay. However, as technological advances were made in the early Nineties, SEGA gradually introduced more depth to the gameplay until the final instalment, *Wonder Boy VI*, was released in Japan in 1994. However, in the West the curtain had been brought down on *Wonder Boy* three years earlier – possibly because the series and, indeed, the name *Wonder Boy* was starting to seem out-of-date next to the new generation of game heroes such as Sonic The Hedgehog. Thankfully, *Wonder Boy In Monster World* did make it out here and although its roots were firmly planted in the past, a heavy emphasis on weapons, magic and dialogue made for a solid example of the platform/RPG genre.

Not to be confused with *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* or *Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair*, *Wonder Boy In Monster World* was only ever released on the Mega Drive and was far larger than most of the games in the series, simply because it wasn't translated from an arcade title. Although many of the towns and dungeons were stereotypical (as was the 'this world was once peaceful' storyline), it really felt like the developers had thoroughly enjoyed working on the project. Although minimalist, the graphical style projected a sense of purity and innocence – themes that were mirrored by the cutesy characters and inoffensive scripting. Even the music was melodic, managing to project a magical, hazy summer afternoon sort of atmosphere.



WBIMW was also fun to play, despite the fact that Wonder Boy himself moved at a frustratingly slow pace and had all the mobility of an OAP in lead boots – which, incidentally, were what you needed to access the underwater levels (the boots, not the OAP). You see, while this was a platform game at heart, progression was based around tasks requested of you by townsfolk, and on the items they presented you with along the way. In fact, this bore more than just a passing resemblance to a certain Nintendo game – a small boy out on an adventure, a fairy that followed him around, an ocarina to get through magically sealed doors…

In all fairness, though this wasn't as good as *Zelda*, it certainly deserves to be remembered. Aside from anything else, it marked the sad end of *Wonder Boy* in the West.





▲ So quirky and cute it could almost be a SNES game.



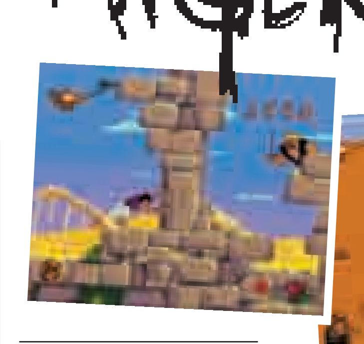
LOOK BACK IN ANGER

A decent movie tie-in, or simply a graphical showpiece with unresponsive controls?

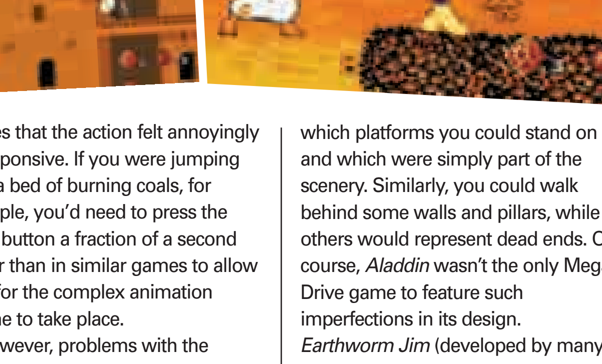
On the whole, movie tie-ins are rubbish. Aside from *GoldenEye* on N64, pretty much every other film-based videogame has failed to do justice to the movie, whilst simultaneously being a poor excuse for a game. However, in 1993, SEGA released a movie tie-in that received great scores across the board, possibly because of its faithfulness to the film from which it had stemmed – Disney's *Aladdin*. Created by Dave Perry (of *Earthworm Jim* and *MDK* fame), the game was developed in conjunction with Disney itself, and actually featured animation that had been especially crafted by some of the original *Aladdin* artists.

As a direct result of Disney's input, *Aladdin* on the Mega Drive looked stunning in every way possible. The environments were all taken directly from the movie and included many of the famous locations, while the animation was some of the best ever in a Mega Drive game. In fact, the animation was so good that it became detrimental to the gameplay. You see, performing something as basic as jumping or throwing an apple required such a large number of frames that the action felt annoyingly unresponsive. If you were jumping over a bed of burning coals, for example, you'd need to press the jump button a fraction of a second earlier than in similar games to allow time for the complex animation routine to take place.

However, problems with the gameplay didn't just stop there. Because of the pretty background graphics, it was often confusing as to which platforms you could stand on and which were simply part of the scenery. Similarly, you could walk behind some walls and pillars, while others would represent dead ends. Of course, *Aladdin* wasn't the only Mega Drive game to feature such imperfections in its design. *Earthworm Jim* (developed by many of the same team members) was just as bad. The amazing thing is that no-one seemed to notice at the time…



▲ *Aladdin* – it's looks were its undoing.



GREAT GAME BOSSES



PARODIUS FANTASTIC JOURNEY

With the somewhat unexpected appearance of Irem's *R-Type Final* last month, it occurred to us that we haven't featured many old-school shoot-'em-ups in our Retro section. These days, there seem to be fewer of them around but 15 years ago when the arcade industry was booming, almost every coin-op released was either a beat-'em-up or a shoot-'em-up. Unsurprisingly, it's this genre that remains one of the favourites with collectors and older gamers.

Although now better known for the likes of *Metal Gear Solid* and *Dance Dance Revolution*, Konami was also responsible for the *Gradius* series of arcade shoot-'em-ups. Much like any other in terms of visuals, the original game was one of the first of its kind to introduce weapon power-ups, while maintaining the sort of quality design and structure for which Konami is still well known. Of course, the company is also famed for its sense of humour and that certainly showed when it developed a parody of its own game, humorously entitled *Parodius* (can you see what they did there?).

The game was virtually identical to *Gradius* to play, though the space rockets and missiles that once littered the screen were replaced with penguins, pigs and various other brightly coloured creatures. *Parodius* proved to be popular with gamers around the world and, predictably, this success resulted in a selection of sequels being released – each featuring progressively bizarre imagery.

Sexy Parodius, for instance, featured a raccoon boss with surprisingly large and really rather prominent genitals, while semi-nude, gyrating women appeared in great numbers throughout the series. However, there was one boss that stood out as being particularly weird – not because of nudity or sexy dancing, but because it threw power-ups at you, enabling you to power-up your ship to its maximum capability in no time at all. Looking like a lump of gelatine with a coin in the centre, the creature would move slowly around the screen firing waves of collectables out, before being shot to death and crashing into a small green planet in the distance. Very odd…

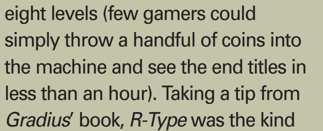


▼ This boss gave generously so that you might live. And for that we thank, er, him? It? Er…





R-TYPE





ASK ANY OLD-SCHOOL SHOOT-'EM-UP FAN TO NAME THEIR FAVOURITE GAME AND THEY'LL INVARIABLY PICK R-TYPE. IREM'S MASTERPIECE BURST INTO ARCADES IN 1987, BUT AN UNFEASIBLY HIGH DIFFICULTY LEVEL ENSURED THAT ONLY THE GREATEST (OR RICHEST) PLAYERS WOULD EVER REACH SOME OF THE FRANCHISE'S BEST MOMENTS. JOIN US AS WE JUMP INTO OUR R-9 TO STOP THE BYDO EMPIRE YET AGAIN…

▶ *R-Type* – the original and best? Quite possibly. This is the game that spawned a thousand shoot-'em-ups…

R-TYPE (ARCADE, 1987)

This is where it all began; from the moment your ship first blasted across the screen, you could feel that Irem's *R-Type* was something special. After shooting down the first waves of Bydo scum, *R-Type* played its finest card – the Force Orb (see 'Use the Force').

It wasn't just the Force Orb that was unique; your firepower was suitably different from other shooters as well. Instead of just simply hammering the fire button for all you were worth, you were able to charge up your Beam by simply holding down the fire button – once fully charged, a Plasma Beam would be unleashed, causing massive damage to anything in its path.

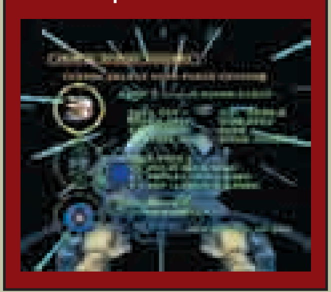
Getting used to the Force Orb and controlling your weapons were just a small part of the game's learning curve. *R-Type*, perhaps more than any other shooter at the time, was structured in such a way that to be a good player simply wasn't enough. You had to memorise and find a safe route through each of the game's eight levels (few gamers could simply throw a handful of coins into the machine and see the end titles in less than an hour). Taking a tip from *Gradius*' book, *R-Type* was the kind of shooter that required you to make your way through the game with as much firepower as possible – get shot, and you'd be facing a ridiculously tough challenge that wasn't for the faint hearted.

Finally, just when you thought you'd mastered getting through a level without dying, you'd have a boss to contend with. While *R-Type*'s first boss was ridiculously easy to beat (simply fire your Force Orb into its stomach and relax), the later bosses were a different matter – all were wonderfully designed and took huge amounts of Plasma before they eventually succumbed. Like the level design, each boss needed to be closely studied before its weakness could be exploited.

It cannot be underestimated just how good this game was – and still is. It received numerous ports to many systems (standouts being the PC Engine and Spectrum versions) and still inspires shooters to this day.

USE THE FORCE

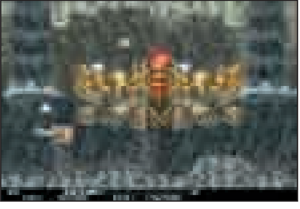
R-Type's Force Orb was one of the most versatile and innovative power-ups ever designed for a shoot-'em-up and is still cloned to this day. Attaching itself to the front or back of your ship, the Force (as it was more commonly known) was able to absorb most bullets and enemies and made for some very strategic gameplay. A quick stab of the second fire button would enable you to launch it forwards or backwards from its current position, where it would then plough through anything that got in its way. A second press would then bring the Orb back towards you so that the whole procedure could be repeated.



R-TYPE II (ARCADE, 1989)

It couldn't have been easy to follow up such a technically impressive and innovative shooter, but Irem's sequel was nearly as accomplished as the original.

R-Type II trod a very similar path to its predecessor – the bio-mechanical aliens were back, many of the bosses reappeared (albeit in slightly different guises) and the distinctive pastel shades of the original were used again to create an immediately familiar feel.



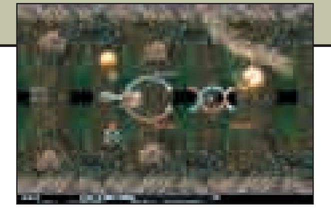
▶ *R-Type II* looked very similar to the original.

There was one big difference though – somebody must have fallen asleep at the difficulty controls because *R-Type II* was bloody hard. The level structure was even more rigid than the original and punished you swiftly and unmercifully. Despite this, though, you never felt that the game was ever unfair and often ended up blaming your frequent deaths on poor reflexes.

Many of the original weapons returned for the sequel along with a few additions. Unfortunately, the so-called Improved Beam was anything but, and although it would unleash a devastating attack when fully charged, it took so long to do so that a quick death was inevitable.

Most of *R-Type*'s stand-out moments were the impressive bosses and those in the sequel were no exception. Huge, devious and able to withstand a lot of firepower, the majority were very similar to those in *R-Type*. Even a small amount of déjà vu couldn't disappoint, as many of the new bosses were superb (see 'You're going down').

R-Type II was more a remake than a direct sequel and a few gamers were disappointed with its many similarities to the original game. Although ported to the 16-bit computers the only console version to appear over here was the disappointing *Super R-Type* on the SNES.



▶ You were armed with an Improved Beam but it wasn't much use in this fearsomely hard game.

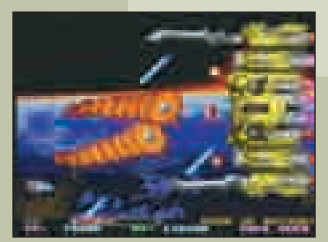
R-TYPE LEO (ARCADE, 1992)

Irem's third stab at the franchise was a brave move that alienated many gamers when it was released, though in hindsight it was probably as good as the original.

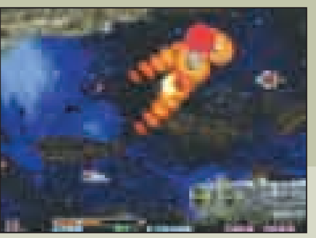
Sadly never getting a release outside Japan (or getting ported to a home console), the most noticeable difference in *R-Type Leo* was the absence of the Force. Once you got over this shock, you soon realised that its replacement was a more than suitable substitute.

The two small orbs (known as Bits) that originally floated above and below your ship in the original games could now be used as an offensive weapon. They could still be used for protection, but were definitely geared towards attacking – especially on some of the later levels, where aggressive use of your Bits was crucial.

Visually the game was superb with vibrant colours, some meticulously designed opponents and fantastically detailed backgrounds. The addition of a second player also helped distance *R-Type Leo* from the original games. However, while having a comrade to help obliterate the Paradise Project (the Bydos must have been busy) was very handy, it detracted from the 'me Vs them' appeal of the series.



▶ Your Bits were now an effective weapon.



▶ This time you had to destroy the Paradise Project.

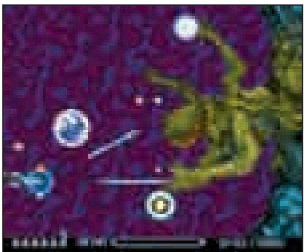
R-TYPE III: THE THIRD LIGHTNING (SNES, 1994)

Not doubt stung by *Leo*'s poor reception, Irem and Jaleco's *R-Type III* was a return to form. The Force Orb returned, the second player was nowhere to be seen and the Bydo Empire struck back.

The *R-Type* franchise has always been technically polished and this outing was no exception. Practically every Mode 7 and transparency trick available was used to great effect – rotating levels, wonderfully constructed bosses and some great sprite scaling all resulted in one of the most technically impressive shoot-'em-ups on the SNES.

New weapons made an appearance and you started each game with a choice of three different Force types: the original, Shadow and Cyclone. Each came with its own array of weapons and took some time to fully master.

Difficulty was also something that had been adjusted thanks to checkpoints scattered throughout each of the six levels. In fact, after the incredibly tough *Super R-Type* it was a pleasant surprise to actually make decent headway into the game. *R-Type III: The Third Lightning* is a solid addition to the *R-Type* canon and is well worth picking up. Rumours of a GBA version persist, so hopefully a new generation of gamers can blast that Bydo scum.





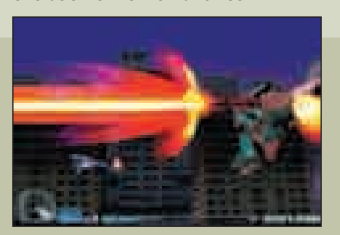
▶ *R-Type III* wasn't an arcade port, which meant Irem and Jaleco could tailor the game to the SNES.

R-TYPE DELTA (PLAYSTATION, 1999)

In 1999, Irem decided that the *R-Type* series needed another makeover. *R-Type Delta* was the result and saw Irem ditching its sprite-based roots for a more consumer-friendly polygon style. Initially ignored by gamers because of its similarity to Square's *Einhander*, *R-Type Delta* is arguably one of the best shooters on the PSone.

First impressions last, and unfortunately *Delta*'s weren't that favourable. For starters, you had three fighters to choose from. Although they were a logical progression from *R-Type III*'s forces, many were upset that other ships dared encroach on the R-9's territory (see 'Choices, choices'). The new graphics were also unpopular with gamers, with many feeling that Irem had not achieved the same bio-mechanical feel of the originals, even though the new look gave the game a wonderful sense of depth. Yet despite these so-called flaws there was still more than enough of the original *R-Type* gameplay to convince initially sceptical fans.

With the implementation of 3D, *R-Type Delta*'s bosses were a sight to behold; often many times the size of the screen, the mechanical behemoths looked spectacular and provided many of the game's most breathtaking moments. *R-Type Delta* is still a classic blaster and a perfect evolution of Irem's franchise.

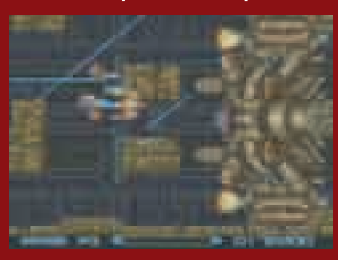


▶ *R-Type Delta* ditched the sprites in favour of polygons but wasn't a hit with fans straight away.

YOU'RE GOING DOWN

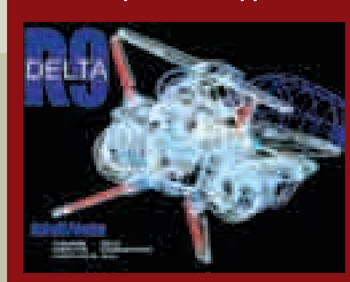
The battles against some of the Bydo bosses in *R-Type II* were particularly tricky, with one of the most exciting encounters being found on level four. Not content with forcing you through a rapidly changing maze, the boss was an absolute nightmare. As it sped away from your R-9 Fighter, your only option was to follow it and send it back to whatever Bydo hell it had sprung from.

However, the final battle was the most memorable. Deep inside the Bydo core was a group of imprisoned R-9 Fighters – in the process of freeing your friends you had to contend with the boss using them against you in one of the toughest battles of the series. Fortunately, upon being freed the R-9 would change sides and help you free your other comrades. A great battle, made all the more poignant by the fact that the fighters later lost their lives so that you could escape.



CHOICES, CHOICES

***R-Type Delta* saw the arrival of three new ships to replace the much put-upon R-9. For the purists out there your best bet was the R-9a Delta. Basically an updated version of the original fighter, the Delta featured a standard Force unit and a new Shockwave Cannon. If you wanted a slightly more powerful beast, it was worth considering the R13 Cerebus; this stocky fighter was heavily armed and featured a weapon called the Hysteric Dawn that tore a hole in space that sucked your enemies into another dimension. Bringing up the rear was the slick RX Albatross. This was the most popular ship of the three simply because its built-in homing device was perfect for lazy pilots.**



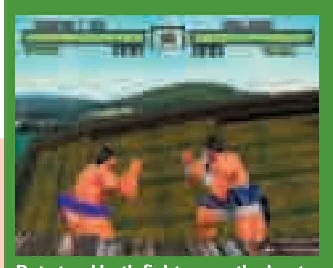


YOU'RE BUGGING ME

Sometimes, despite weeks of bug testing, small problems with program code manage to slip through the net. Many games contain these errors, though most hitches are too small to ever be noticed by the consumer. Occasionally though, the mistakes are so blatant that it makes you wonder how they were never picked up during the beta tests. Such was the case with the Japanese version of *Virtua Fighter 3* on the Dreamcast…



Fighting on the rafts in the Shun stage worked fine to start with – each raft moved independently and a clever piece of programming by AM2 meant that the characters' feet always touched the ground (just about).



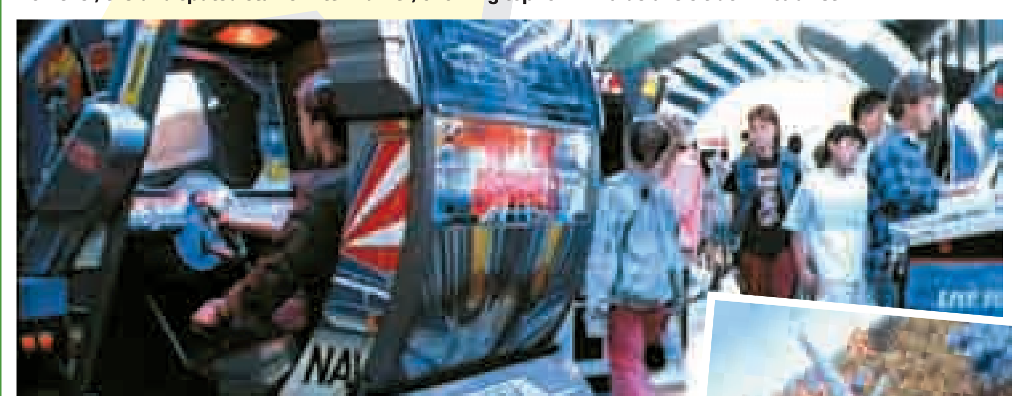
But stand both fighters on the boat – especially two of the larger ones – and something strange would happen. The boat would tip further and further until it totally capsized, leaving the fighters hovering above the water.



Even stranger was the game's attempt to put the fighters' feet on the floor – a floor that was now spinning around and glitching through the rest of the scenery. Amusingly, this left the characters flying around with their legs in the air.

STAR GAMES

Some films are made into games, but some games actually appear in films. This month we look at *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, which features cameo performances from *Missile Command*, *Space Invaders* and *Trog*. However, the undisputed star is *After Burner*, showing top form in a deluxe sit-down cabinet.



You'll probably remember *After Burner*'s performance in *Terminator 2*. The scene began with John Connor (Edward Furlong) and his friend (the one with the attractive red mullet) turning up at the arcade, having mouthed off at John's foster parents, sped off on his motorbike and used an Atari to steal money from a cash point. Next stop: every hard-core gamer's dream arcade, The Galleria, which was crammed with classic coin-ops.

After a close-up shot of *Missile Command*, the scene cut to John Connor playing *After Burner*. And this wasn't just any version of *After Burner* – it was the deluxe, sit-down cabinet with the rotating cockpit and moving seat.

Unlike most videogames in movies, *After Burner* in *T2* wasn't just a piece of furniture that lurked in the background. With extended footage of both the hydraulic cabinet in motion and the game itself, SEGA's classic managed to upstage the two young actors.

But kudos to John Connor for spending his last few minutes of pre-T1000 freedom playing a top-notch version of a great game.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO?

THE SEGA R360 ARCADE CABINET

Many retro games have become obsolete over the years, but while tapes, discs and cartridges are easy enough to dispose of, what happens to all the out-of-date arcade cabinets?

Just as Amusement Vision's deluxe *F-Zero AX* cabinet is capable of turning heads in the arcades, *After Burner* (like the sit-down version in *Terminator 2*) was just as impressive all those years ago. However, both of these machines pale in comparison to daddy of them all – the SEGA R360.

Released in 1991 (the same year as *Terminator 2*, funnily enough), the R360 was a monster of an arcade cabinet that allowed for complete 360-degree movement while playing either *G-LOC* or *Strike Fighter*. Featuring a seatbelt, shoulder restraints, an emergency stop button and a perspex security fence that surrounded it, the machine was such



▲ "Remember, fun is the key, but stay seated at all times or you may die." How true.

a potential hazard to bystanders that an attendant was required to be on hand whenever it was in use. Only a handful of arcades ever stocked this mammoth cabinet, and seeing as it cost £2 per play, interest in the machine was relatively short-lived.

But what happened to all the R360



cabinets after the novelty wore off? Apparently, the last one in the UK was housed in an arcade in London, but was dismantled then scrapped a few years ago when the owner discovered that it wouldn't fit through the new doorways that had been built since the machine was delivered. As far as we know, the nearest one still in use is somewhere in Spain, so unless you're off for a holiday in the sun, you'll have to make do with looking at the pictures.



SABOTEUR (Spectrum 48k, Amstrad CPC) Durell Software, 1986



RETRO MICRO GAMES ACTION

Classic Machine

ATARI 2600 VCS

WHETHER IT WAS PAC-MAN, DEFENDER OR SPACE INVADERS, ATARI'S 2600 VIDEO COMPUTER SYSTEM (VCS) OFFERED GAMERS ALL THE BEST TITLES. HOWEVER, WHAT STARTED SO WELL WOULD COME TUMBLING DOWN AT A MEMORABLE LOW POINT IN EIGHTIES GAMING HISTORY.

Released in America in 1977, many see the Atari 2600 VCS as the true beginning of videogaming as we know it. The system, which came packaged with two CX40 joysticks and a CX30 paddle controller (which was particularly suitable for games such as *Pong*), featured six silver switches, a cartridge slot, and sported a decidedly Seventies-looking woodgrain and black plastic finish. These 'Woodies', as they're now called by collectors, were robust and could withstand even the most energetic gaming.

Going on sale at $200 (£123), initial sales of the system were slow, but Warner Communications (which had bought Atari for $28 million a year previously) wasn't going to sit back and watch its product flop. Over the next few years, the company managed to secure an impressive number of exclusive titles for the format (both in-house and third-party), and by 1980 the console was booming. In fact, Christmas that year turned out to be a disappointment for many children as Atari simply couldn't manufacture enough hardware to meet the demand, and the system sold out. It was later revealed that the company had made a record profit of $2 billion during that year.

However, with confidence now overflowing from its runaway success, Atari was becoming complacent, and the 2600 started to be inundated with poor-quality releases. By 1983 the market could no longer support the amount of tat that was being churned out and the videogames industry went into a decline. During that year, many smaller developers went out of business, and Atari posted a net loss of $533 million – mostly due to the overproduction of unpopular titles. A short while later, reports were issued suggesting that a large number of unsold Atari cartridges were being buried in the desert, and it seemed that the company's grip on the videogames industry was finally at an end.

Despite the demise of the 2600 VCS, Atari managed to remain competitive in the industry for a further four years, with cheaper, more compact versions of the console continuing to sell at a steady rate. But during 1988 the company managed to lose another $84.8 million, and with the Nintendo Entertainment System dominating the market, it was impossible for it to regain its foothold. Atari would never again enjoy the success it had had in 1980. Of course, with Infogrames now officially calling itself Atari (after acquiring the company nearly three years ago), that may well change in the near future…

SPECIFICATIONS

CPU (Central Processing Unit): 8-bit MOS Technology
CPU Speed: 1.19 MHz
GPU (Graphics Processing Unit): 'STELLA' TIA (Television Interface Adapter)
GPU Speed: 1.19Mhz
Memory: Main RAM (Random Access Memory): 128 Bytes
Resolution: 320 x 200
Colours: 256
Maximum Colours Displayed At Once: 16
Sound Channels: 2

◀ The Atari 2600 VCS was a well-built machine that was seen by many as the first true console. Sadly, the industry slump of 1983 hit Atari hard and the 2600 faded away.

SIX OF THE BEST

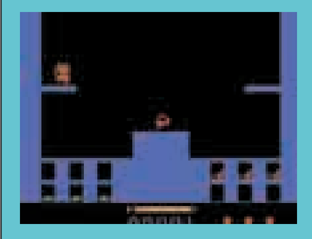
Here are six great titles that were available for the Atari 2600. They may look simplistic now, but believe us – at the time these were at the cutting edge of electronic videogames. Forget Grand Theft Auto and check out these beauties…

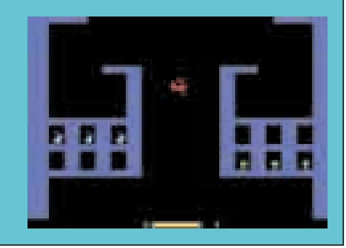
SKY SKIPPER

Publisher: **Parker Brothers**
Year: **1983**

Based on a Nintendo arcade game, the main objective in *Sky Skipper* was simply to save caged animals that were being held captive by a gorilla. This was achieved by temporarily knocking him out with bombs, then collecting the animals in your biplane – a task that was made more difficult by the limited amount of fuel you were given at the start of each mission.

Although translated by the Parker Brothers, the game managed to maintain the quality of a Nintendo release – right down to the cutesy visuals.



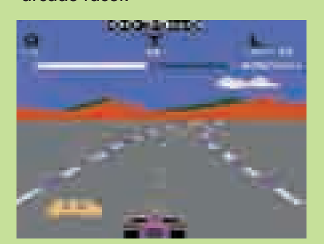


POLE POSITION

Publisher: **Atari**
Year: **1983**

Once one of the most popular non-character-based videogames of all time, *Pole Position* was featured in the 1985 children's film, *D.A.R.Y.L.* Now merely just another retro racing game, *Pole Position* was extremely popular thanks to its instant pick-up and-play quality – rather than reaching checkpoints, the objective was simply to pass enough rivals in a set time.

Good-looking and fast moving, the game blended realism (well, it was realistic as you could hope for back then) with all the thrills, spills and excitement of an arcade racer.

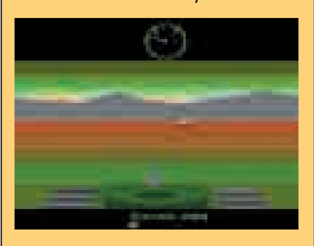


BATTLEZONE

Publisher: **Atari**
Year: **1983**

Based on the 1980 coin-op by Ed Rotberg, *Battlezone* was an early tank simulator in which you had to destroy enemy battalions, jet fighters and even flying saucers. The original arcade version of the game featured twin joysticks to accentuate the feeling of driving a tank, and while this control feature was obviously removed from the home version, many felt that the 2600 conversion was more playable.

Amazingly, it was possible to get enemies shooting at each other by using those in close range to shield you from others that were further away.

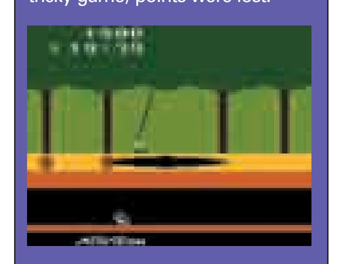


PITFALL

Publisher: **Activision**
Year: **1982**

Playing as jungle explorer Pitfall Harry, the objective of *Pitfall* was simply to collect treasure, while avoiding all the dangers of the jungle – sort of like *I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here*, only much more realistic and amusing.

You began the game with 2,000 points and more could be earned by collecting money, silver, gold and diamonds. However, each time you made a mistake (which was fairly regularly – this was a tricky game) points were lost.



COMBAT

Publisher: **Atari**
Year: **1978**

Also known as *Tank Plus*, *Combat* came packaged with the 2600 and featured a massive 27 games all based around a combat theme. Much like *Mario Party* or *Super Monkey Ball*, the game offered a decent enough single-player mode, though it was the multiplayer option that really added to the overall longevity.

Space Invaders, on the other hand (which was available at the same time), initially attracted people to the machine, though many gamers found that it became samey far too quickly. Not a problem for *Combat*…

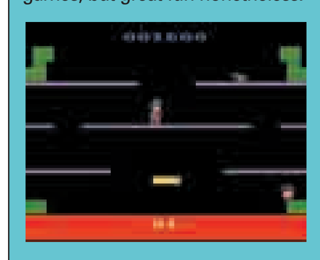


MARIO BROS.

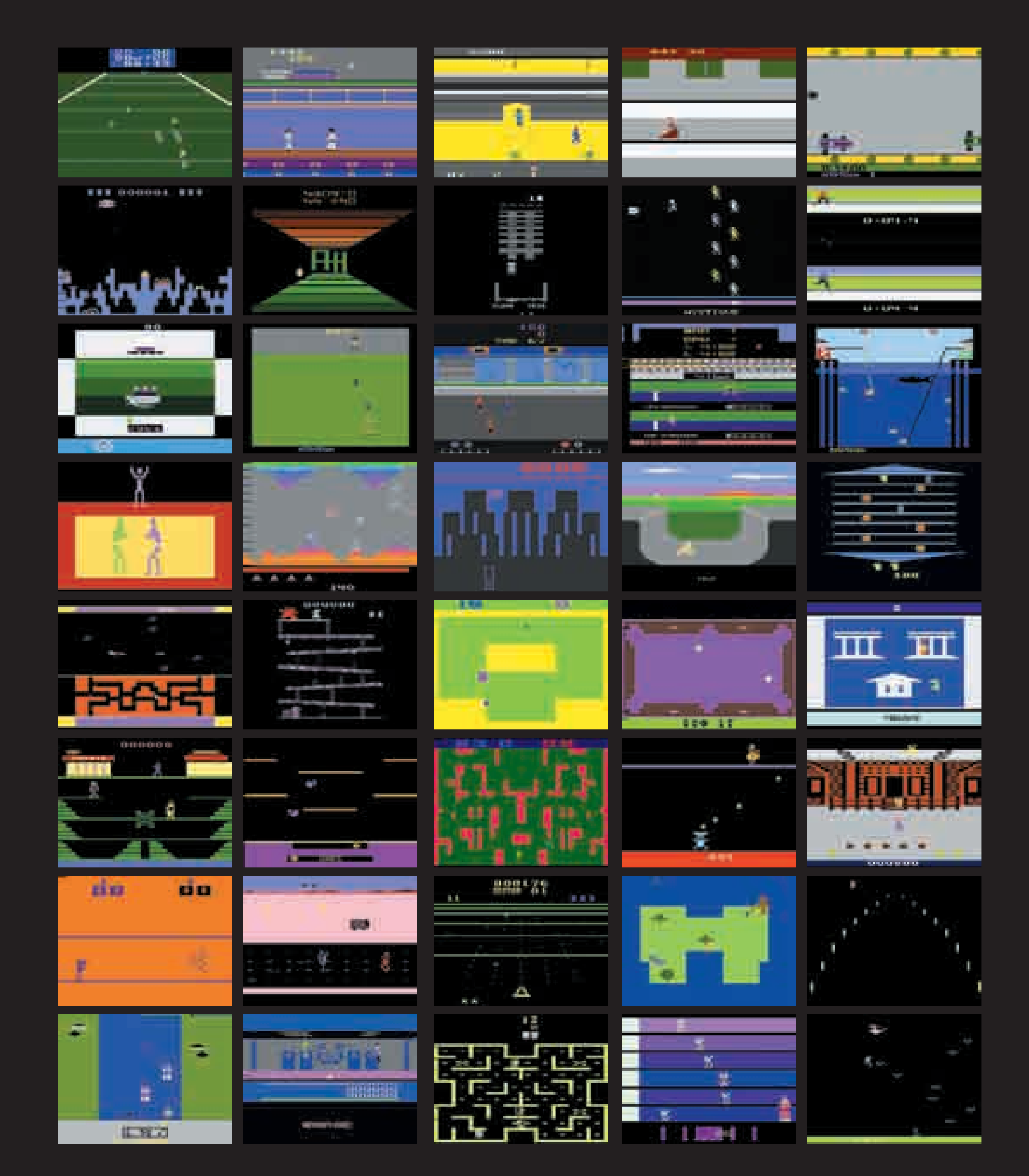
Publisher: **Atari**
Year: **1983**

The original *Mario Bros.* was included as a bonus feature with *Super Mario Bros. 3* on the NES and with each of the *Mario* translations on GBA. However, it was sold as a standalone title when Atari published it for the 2600 back in 1983.

Using either Mario or Luigi, the aim of the game was simply to destroy creatures that came out of pipes by knocking them onto their backs then stamping on them. Simple compared to later *Mario* games, but great fun nonetheless.



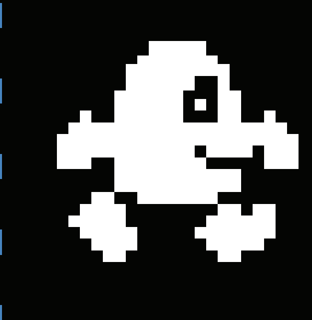
ATARI 2600 VCS





Codemasters®





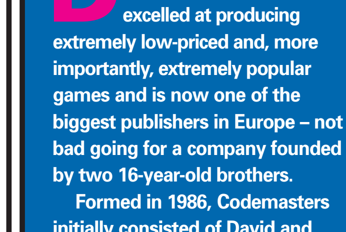




If there's one thing we miss from the days of 8-bit gaming, it's being able to buy a new game for £1.99. Codemasters was renowned for its top-quality, much-loved, budget-priced games, so we caught up with the 21st Century Codies to get the inside story…

During the Eighties and Nineties, Codemasters excelled at producing extremely low-priced and, more importantly, extremely popular games and is now one of the biggest publishers in Europe – not bad going for a company founded by two 16-year-old brothers.

Formed in 1986, Codemasters initially consisted of David and Richard Darling and their father Jim, who's now chairman. *BMX Simulator* (basically *Super Sprint* on bikes) was Codemasters' first release and made its debut on the Commodore 64. The game went to number one and stayed there for so long that it eventually won a longevity award from chart masters Gallup.



Thanks to *Grand Prix Simulator* by the Oliver twins, the *Simulator* series became very popular, and pretty soon Codemasters seemed to be simulating anything from golf to pub trivia – nothing was too obscure. Later games like *Pinball Simulator* and *Pro Tennis Simulator* created a much more realistic interpretation of the sport in question and created a trend for realism that still exists in Codemasters' current releases – *Colin McRae Rally* and *TOCA Race Driver* being prime examples.

It wasn't only software that Codemasters designed; the Game Genie was an extremely clever cheat device (very similar to the Action Replay) and after a lengthy battle with Nintendo (see 'I'll see you in court') it finally reached shops and made Codemasters an absolute fortune.

The J-Cart for the Mega Drive and a selection of CD compilations for the Commodore 64 and Spectrum were further examples of how far Codemasters was prepared to go to offer the best it could to gamers around the world.

Nowadays, Codemasters continues to deliver a versatile range of games and is behind some very popular franchises. We managed to catch up with with David Darling, founder and now CEO of Codemasters, before he jetted off to this year's E3.

When did you first start coding games?

Counting it up, it's over 20 years ago now – 1981. In those days we didn't even have keyboards, we worked using punch cards on the school computers.

How did you first get into games publishing?

We were developing from home under the name of Galactic Software, coding, copying up cassettes and selling games for the Commodore Vic 20, Dragon 32 and BBC by mail order through small ads in *Popular Computing Weekly*.

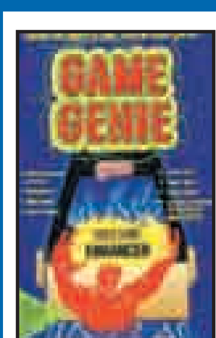
How was the jump in price from Codemasters to the Codemasters Plus range greeted by the public?

We always wanted to offer value for money, so with the Codemasters Plus range there would be the main game on one cassette and a second tape with additional levels, alternative game modes, and special modes for specific machines such as the Spectrum 128K.

Your Simulator range was very successful, any chance of reviving it?

In a kind of way the *Simulator* range has lived on, at least in the

I'll see you in court



Nintendo has always fervently guarded its products and is very wary of anyone who attempts to pirate or alter its games – so when Codemasters was getting ready to release its Game Genie all hell broke loose…

The Game Genie essentially enabled gamers to hack into the code of NES (and later, SNES) titles and change parameters within the games. Nintendo was furious with this, claiming it infringed on its copyright. The battle between David and Goliath had begun and, just like the story, the giant eventually lost.

After four years and much stress for the Darlings, the case was eventually closed in their favour and Codemasters received $15 million from Nintendo. Once the Game Genie eventually went on sale it managed to net the tenacious Brits a cool $140 million. A huge figure back in 1990 and something that probably helped Codemasters get where it is today.



authenticity of our games with titles such as *Colin McRae Rally, TOCA Race Driver* and the *Club Football* series. Bringing out realism and an authentic experience through gameplay is still very important for us.

Is there any Simulator title you wished you had made, and if so, why?

It's hard to think – we did most of them and then probably exhausted our list.

Dizzy was also incredibly successful for you. Will he ever reappear, perhaps on the GBA?

Dizzy, created by The Oliver twins who now run Blitz Games, was great for his day and proved very popular with gamers. Who knows if we will ever see his like again?

Do you think games were better in the old days?

They were really playable and provided incredibly fresh entertaining experiences at the time. It's sometimes better to enjoy the nostalgia when you re-look at them. It's amazing how gameplay has come on over the years.

How did you come up with the firm's name?

After many a discussion, we ended up with a huge list. We nearly called the company Computer Food (The Best Thing To Feed Your Computer) but changed our minds after a few days. So from our original big list, Codemasters was the one we all agreed on.

▶ David Darling set up Codemasters with his brother Richard when they were both just 16. Tsk, kids, eh? Always up to something…

And whose idea was it to blatantly plug your products on the back of each game?

It's just like adding a personality to the games. Many developers were faceless then and it connects the players to the creator.

What are your favourite Codemasters games?

Dizzy, Micro Machines, Colin and *TOCA* – they were the ones I return to a lot, but obviously we've enjoyed every game, we've got great teams here.

What other titles do you admire?

Metal Gear Solid and *Halo* still eat up my spare time.

What's your company ethos and how much has it changed since the beginning?

Innovation, gameplay, honesty and realism in game content – we still focus on delivering the key elements gamers want.

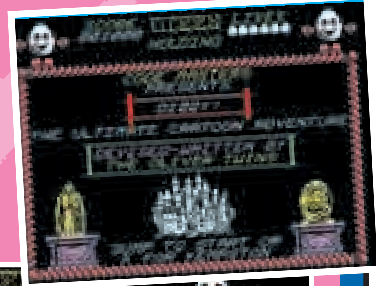
Feeling Dizzy

Codemasters had a massive hit and a very lucrative franchise on its hands when the Oliver twins created the loveable egg Dizzy. The game's premise was as simple and charming as its main character – the evil wizard Zaks was up to no good and needed to be defeated. It was down to Dizzy to collect four ingredients and create a magical potion that would kill the wicked sorcerer (although he somehow managed to keep on reappearing for the many sequels).

What followed was a classic platform/adventure title that saw you traversing the flick-screen environments and solving fairly simple puzzles. Like many games of old, certain sections of *Dizzy* required precision jumping and timing, with one segment in particular being especially dangerous… A section of the Haunted Forest contained an extremely devious trap; if you failed to cross at the correct place the ground would fall away and you'd be trapped, unable to complete the game.

Despite this small flaw, *Dizzy* was still a huge success and later appeared in 14 sequels and spin-offs. He appeared on a variety of formats including the 8-bit consoles and 16-bit computers and even has dedicated websites like Dizzy's Domain at http://uranus.spaceports.com/~sam.

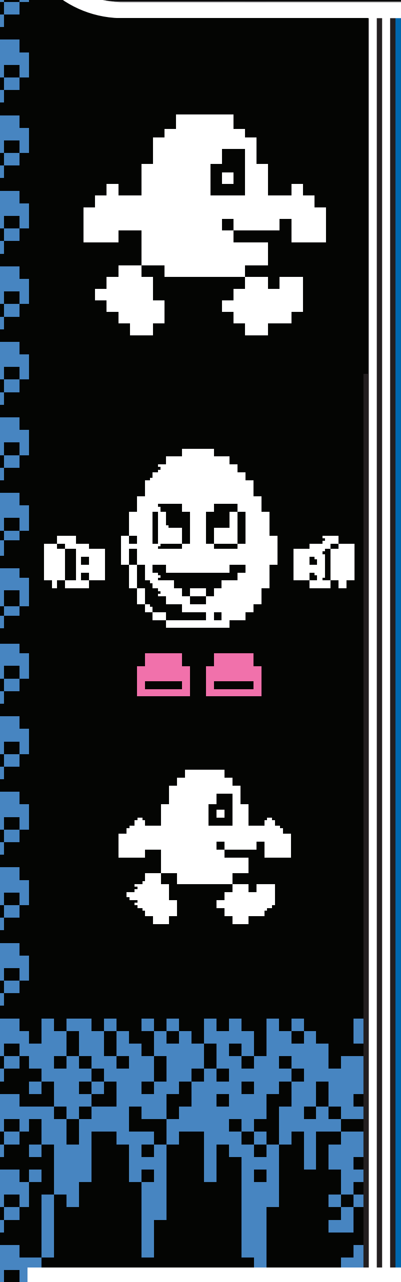
Dizzy still has plenty of charm and many of his titles are as playable today as they were then, even stinkers like *Fast Food* (an uninspired *Pac-Man* rip-off) did little to crack the little fella's shell. Now all we need is for all his titles to reappear on the GBA…





Codemasters





Mark my words

In the late Eighties, the Codies (as they were affectionately known) were the masters of hyperbole. Although quotes appeared on many game boxes, it wasn't very often that they came from the actual head of a company. Here are a few of its most over-the-top, utterly objective comments…

INTERNATIONAL RUGBY SIMULATOR

"An amazing mixture of strategy and fast action – definitely the best rugby game, ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT!"

BMX SIMULATOR 2

"BMX 2 makes the others eat dirt! – It's so realistic, and with FOUR PLAYERS it's CRUCIAL!!!"

TWIN TURBO V8

"The Fastest road game I've ever seen on the Amstrad – amazingly playable, just like real performance car driving!!!"

GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR 2

"I'm utterly gobsmacked! This is REALLY GOOD – I think that this is the best Oliver Twins game ever!"

TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY

"Dizzy's Treasure Island is brilliant – it's like a real cartoon but with amazing gameplay"

Collating a selection of your hits on a CD for the Spectrum was a masterstroke. How did it come about?

The CD Games Collection rode on the boom of CD players coming into the home. It was quite a technical achievement for the time, especially connecting them to a Spectrum or Commodore 64. We'd been building up our expertise in developing hardware as well as software and it came through from a bright idea and lots of experimentation.

Micro Machines was a superb title and extremely similar to the Simulators of old. Was this a conscious decision?

Not really. Andrew Graham was the creator of the original *Micro Machines* and he also wrote some of the *Simulators*, such as *Pro Ski Simulator* on the Amiga. He's really good at core gameplay mechanics.

Q: How hard was it to break into the US market?

It's always easier in your home market because you can intuitively sense if something is going to work in it or not. We tried breaking into the US about seven years ago, at the same time we were setting up our French and German offices.

We thought we'd better concentrate on setting them up successfully first and they've been remarkably successful. It's really in the last few years we've been building up our US operation and putting significant efforts into the US infrastructure, product development and so on, it's now starting to pay off.

Last year we had our first US number one, *Operation Flashpoint*, and this year we launch the *IndyCar* series – the official game of the US motorsport. We want to do over there what we've done over here in Europe for motorsport gaming with the *McRae Rally* and *TOCA* series.

Your Game Genie court case was a classic case of David Vs Goliath. How stressful was it taking on the might of a company like Nintendo?

It was stressful in the kind of way that really focuses you, but we never stopped believing in our product or our arguments.

And how did you feel when the court ruled in your favour?

Relieved!

What was it like appearing on Number 73 [ancient Saturday morning kids' show] and were they all as mad as they looked?

They were all really great and it was fun to be in the middle of a TV show being made. You usually only see it from the outside. It's really quite hectic.

You've been in the industry for a very long time now; how does everything compare to when you first started?

It's very different in some ways – it is a really massive industry now, very professional, a proper mass entertainment industry, but we still love making games and playing games, that's still the same.

Better than life

So what if your car simply consisted of a rectangle with a pixel to show the front? Who cared if you only got to race against one other opponent and that it was a complete rip-off of *Super Sprint*? We certainly didn't.

Despite its rather limited looks there was no denying that the Oliver twins' *Grand Prix Simulator* was a fantastic title. First appearing on the Amstrad CPC 464 before being ported to the C64 and Spectrum, *Grand Prix Simulator*'s grand claims to be an actual sim were tenuous. You couldn't upgrade your vehicles, a simple turn could send you skidding into oblivion and the cars often got stuck on parts of the track.

What the Oliver twins did deliver, though, was a highly enjoyable and competitive game (especially against another player)





and it cemented Codemasters' reputation so much that the *Simulator* name was almost as big a draw as its *Dizzy* titles.

A sequel appeared in 1989 with improved visuals and a third vehicle. Though a much better game, it didn't have the wow factor of the original (but digitised speech was a vast improvement).

MUSIC MAN: DAVID WHITTAKER

David Whittaker was just one of the many programmers who worked wonders with various sound chips in the days of 8 and 16-bit computers. games™ finds out what it was like working for Codemasters and being a part of the gaming scene in general.

How and when did you first get into programming?

I used to buy *Your Computer* magazine even before I had, or could afford, a computer back in about 1980. I read all the programming articles in depth, so I suppose I could program even before I had something to program with. I couldn't afford a ZX81 (as it was mail order-only then) so I got a VIC-20 for my birthday in 1982, on 'the drip' from Dixons.

But I couldn't afford a cassette deck so all the programs I typed in had to work first time (or the machine would crash). Even then, I lost it all when I turned it off. This taught me to be really precise and I learned to correct all the many errors in the Commodore manual (including the later CBM-64 manual, which was little better).

What was it like working for Codemasters on some of its classic titles?

Good and bad. They gave me lots of work, but they paid peanuts.

You've come up with some great tunes for the likes of Treasure Island Dizzy, BMX Simulator and the Grand Prix series. What was your favourite piece of Codemasters music you wrote?

I don't really have one – I can't remember most of them. Maybe the *Count Dracula* one, or *Poltergeist*.

Were the old days better for games?

Yes, because the industry was so small, and most people knew each other so it was much less corporate. At the time, everything was new and exciting but now it's all marketing BS.

How much has the music side of the industry changed?

Drastically. In the old days, you had to have so many skills, not just composing or arranging – you had to be a programmer too, which is what really interested me, more than the music. You had to work so hard to get anything decent out of the crappy (but much-loved) sound chips.

So what are you up to at the moment?

I'm working for Jester Interactive [creators of the *Music* games] in North Wales, as senior audio dude. www.jesterinteractive.com.

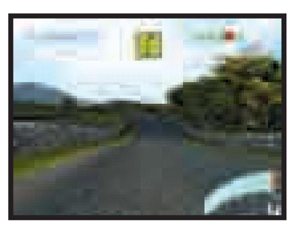


Eating dirt in style

Colin McRae 3 may have been a masterful display of graphical engineering but underneath the surface gloss was a somewhat soulless experience. Thank god, then, for *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* on the humble PlayStation. Here was the perfect example of a title that took an already great game and transformed it into something even better. Everything about the game was perfect; the graphics engine had received a much-needed overhaul, loading times had suitably shortened and the gameplay had been greatly improved. *McRae*'s physics engine was also (at the time) a technical marvel thanks to borrowing heavily from the designers of Codemasters' excellent *TOCA* series.

With 13 cars to choose from, a highly addictive Championship mode and some of the most spectacular crashes seen at the time, *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* earned its reputation as one of the best rally games on a home system. The fact that we still blow the dust off our PlayStations to play it says it all. Unless the fourth outing comes up with the goods at E3 we're sticking with *McRae 2.0*…





Small but perfectly formed

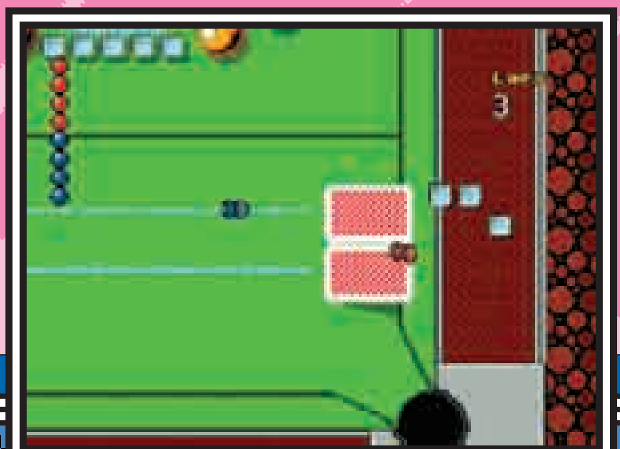
Micro Machines appeared on the Mega Drive in 1991 and remains one of the most playable racers to this day. Not only was the game superb fun, it also made excellent use of the Galoob licence upon which it was based (you know, those tiny model cars that came in packs of five).

Using toy cars (as well as boats, tanks and a selection of other vehicles) enabled Codemasters to let you race on some of the most bizarre circuits ever seen. Standout tracks included a breakfast table, complete with bowls, spilt milk and cereal to negotiate, and a workshop with all manner of tools and other dangerous objects to avoid. The most fun, though, was taking to your dragster and racing around a toilet seat – tough, but still incredibly enjoyable.

Another great aspect of the series was the fantastic multi-player aspect. While the original game only allowed two players to compete against each other, *Micro Machines 2* took the multiplayer madness of Party mode even further by allowing up to eight-player participation.

Codemasters had kindly created a new J-cart that came complete with two joystick ports (no need for a Multi-tap) and some clever programming enabled two players to share one joypad.

With *Micro Machines* offering so much multiplayer joy over the last 12 years we're still amazed how Infogrames' Sheffield House managed to make such a hash of the 128-bit versions. Here's hoping Codemasters gets the licence back and give the series the glory it deserves.



◀ For cueball-dodging, baize-ripping driving action, you'll be needing *Micro Machines*.



GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT…

WILD RIDERS

GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT…



Some games get cancelled before they make it onto the shelves. Others get released in Japan, but never get converted to English. And a few – like SEGA's Wild Riders – get released in the arcade, but never make it as far as our homes…



▲ Screw the roadblock – use the handlebars on the cabinet to slide under the barrier.

Title: **Wild Riders**
Developer: **SEGA**
Format: **Naomi 2**
Release date: **2001**

Although the Dreamcast wasn't the success that SEGA was hoping for, there's no doubt that it did boast a catalogue of superb games. With classics like *Shenmue*, *Rez*, *Sonic Adventure* and *Jet Set Radio*, you could argue that the machine introduced some of the most groundbreaking titles that the industry had seen in quite a few years. The Dreamcast also received a range of SEGA arcade translations including *The House Of The Dead 2*, *Crazy Taxi* and *Ferrari F355 Challenge* – all of which proved the company's unmatched ability to create thrilling, though often short-lived, gaming experiences.

Towards the end, however, the rate at which SEGA translated its arcade games slowed down, simply because the games weren't selling. This situation meant that a small selection of decent arcade games, mostly ones with limited longevity, were never released in the home at all – titles such as *Wild Riders*, which, due to being developed on the newer Naomi 2 chipset, would have had to have been cut down to run on Dreamcast anyway.

Featuring the sort of cel-shaded loveliness that had given *Jet Set Radio* its striking visuals a year earlier, *Wild Riders* (with the added power of Naomi 2) certainly offered plenty to look at. Styled to look just like a comic book, the story of two bikers – Trish Moon and Keith Raven – was portrayed through a selection of comic book-esque drawings which then came to life in full 3D. *Wild Riders* is still one of the best examples of cel-shading (or 'manga edge' as it's sometimes known) to date, despite the newer, more powerful technology now on offer.

Aside from the vivid visuals, the game was also a blast to play despite being extremely simplistic. The main premise was simply to get to the next checkpoint along an A-to-B route, while avoiding the police – nothing particularly innovative there then. However, by pushing or pulling the handlebars that were mounted on the arcade cabinet, you could slide the bike or perform wheelies to get added reach when launching off ramps and edges. After a couple of attempts, it was possible to slide under police roadblocks or carry out death-defying leaps over buildings, often finding short cuts in the process.

Nowadays, the only way to play *Wild Riders* is to find one of the few arcades that still has the machine – a difficult task considering that hardly any stocked it in the first place. With SEGA still struggling, the chances of a console translation are extremely slim. Oh well, looks like just another game that never quite made it…

CEL-BY DATE

Although cel-shading is still a fairly new graphical effect, it was actually introduced during the late Nineties. SEGA's *Jet Set Radio* on Dreamcast is widely seen as being the title that perfected the technique, though the team responsible for it later revealed that inspiration had come from a graphics demo by Melbourne House. Interestingly, the Melbourne House demo was released in the form of *Looney Tunes Space Race* later that year.

2000

Jet Set Radio **(DC)**
SEGA

2000

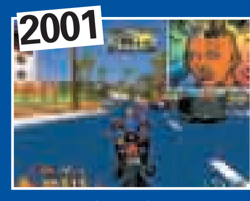
Looney Tunes Space Race **(DC)**
Melbourne House

2000

Wacky Races **(DC)**
Infogrames

2001

Fur Fighters: Viggo's Revenge **(PS2)**
Bizarre Creations

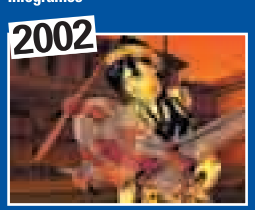
2001

Wild Riders **(Arcade)**
SEGA

2002

Auto Modellista **(PS2)**
Capcom

2002

Cel Damage **(GC, PS2, Xbox)**
Pseudo Interactive

2002

GioGio's Bizarre Adventure **(PS2)**
Capcom

2002

Jet Set Radio Future **(Xbox)**
SEGA Smilebit

2002

Loons: The Fight For Fame **(Xbox)**
Warthog



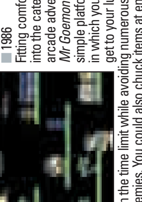
MATCH DAY (Spectrum 48k, BBC Micro) Ocean, 1984



GOEMON

Just like Konami's *Castlevania* games (which we looked at last month), the *Goemon* series has also lasted for 17 glorious gaming years. However, while most gamers are aware of *Castlevania*, we doubt if many would know what we were on about if we started spouting off about Goemon, his sidekick Ebisumaru, or their giant robot, Impact – let alone ninja woman Yae or the battery-powered ninja, Sasuke. But why is it that so few people have heard of this superb selection of adventure-cum-role-playing games? Well, the fact of the matter is that just a handful of *Goemon* titles have made it to Europe – most were only ever released in Japan, where the folklore that surrounds the characters (which are supposedly based on real 14th Century thieves) is known by many gamers. Perhaps if Konami removed all the vibrant colours and armed Goemon with twin pistols, it would be more appealing to Western players…

MR. GOEMON



- Arcade
- 1986

Fitting comfortably into the category of arcade adventure, *Mr Goemon* was a simple platform game in which you had to get to your luggage within the time limit while avoiding numerous waves of enemies. You could also chuck items at enemies.

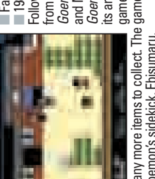
GANBARE GOEMON: KARAKURI DOUCHUU

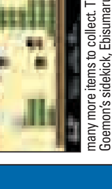


- Famicom, MSX
- 1986

Although different from the arcade game in terms of looks and gameplay, *Ganbare Goemon* on MSX and NES had similar pacing and enemy attacks. This version also allowed you to move up and down within the environments.

GANBARE GOEMON 2





- Famicom
- 1989

Following directly on from *Ganbare Goemon* on Famicom and MSX, *Ganbare Goemon 2* retained its arcade-style gameplay, but with many more items to collect. The game also featured Goemon's sidekick, Ebisumaru.

GANBARE GOEMON GAIDEN: KIETA OUGON KISERU



- Famicom
- 1990

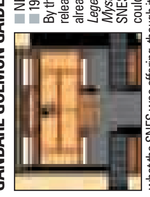
Although visually this wasn't hugely different from other NES *Goemon* games, the gameplay was totally new. RPG elements were introduced and, although it was rather linear, it helped to shape many of Konami's future games.

GANBARE GOEMON: SARAWARENTA EBISUMARU

- Game Boy
- 1991

Due to the limitations of the Game Boy, Konami wasn't able to make this a fully-fledged RPG like the SNES version, though there were RPG elements. Shops sold power-ups and there were even hotels where you could recharge your health.

GANBARE GOEMON GAIDEN 2



- NES
- 1992

By the time this was released, Konami had already developed *Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* for the SNES. The NES couldn't compete with what the SNES was offering, though it certainly gave it a shot with this incredibly Japanese *Goemon* game.

THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

- SNES
- 1991

Konami made the most of the new 16-bit graphics with this title. Now regarded as an RPG, the game featured a blend of typical RPG villages and traditional side-scrolling platform gaming. Best of all, two players could work together to get through it.

GANBARE GOEMON 2: KITERETSU SHOGUN MAGGINESU

- Super Famicom
- 1993

By the mid-Nineties, Konami was getting top performance from the SNES. Aside from the odd nasty moment of slowdown (something which was more of a problem in the two-player mode), this game was similar to the first… only better.

GANBARE GOEMON 3

- Super Famicom
- 1994

While the structure of *Ganbare Goemon 3* was like that of the previous SNES games, it lacked polish. At this time a number of Konami employees left to start their own company, Treasure, so some of *Goemon's* designers may have gone too.

GANBARE GOEMON 4: KIRAKIRA DOUCHUU



- Super Famicom
- 1995

With four playable characters – Goemon, Ebisumaru, Yae and Sasuke – this was one of the oddest games in the series, with a plot in which Japan gets infested with aliens. This title laid a heavier emphasis on mini-games than before.

FAMILY TREE

We take a look at the history of one of Konami's lesser-known videogame series. How many of these bizarre titles do you remember?

KONAMI KRAZY RACING



■ GBA
■ 2001

Although this featured a selection of Konami's best-known characters, *Goemon* was at the centre of the game. Almost identical to *Super Mario Kart* in terms of visuals and gameplay, this was certainly fun to play, if a little unoriginal.

GANBARE GOEMON: KUROFUNE TOU NO NAZO

■ Game Boy
■ 1997

It was surprising that *Kurofune Tou No Nazo* was released on the standard Game Boy at such a late stage. What was also odd was that rather than taking the usual comedy approach this was far more serious and realistic.

GO GO GOEMON

■ GBC
■ 1999

With the new colour display of the GBC, Konami was able to develop a handheld *Goemon* game along the lines of the original SNES game. With little to compare it to, this was certainly the best *Goemon* on the Game Boy to date.

GANBARE GOEMON: HOSHIZORASHI DYNAMITES ARAWARU!!

■ GBC
■ 2000

In the same way that the first GBC *Goemon* game mirrored the original SNES game, this had much in common with *Ganbare Goemon 2*. With larger sprites and more colour, this wasn't a classic but looked absolutely gorgeous.

GOEMON NEW AGE SHUUTSUDOU!

■ GBA
■ 2002

New Age Shuutsudou was planned for release in the West but then disappeared. With multiple playable characters, it would certainly be a nice addition to anyone's GBA library, though now it looks unlikely that this will ever happen.

GOEMON: SHIN SEDAI SHUUMEI

■ PSone
■ 2001

Unlike the pre-rendered *Ooedo Daikaiten*, this had hand-drawn sprites. The game felt more modern than the '14th Century Japan' theme that had run through much of the rest of the series, and looked more like *MegaMan* than *Goemon*.

GANBARE GOEMON: OOEDO DAIKAITEN



■ PSone
■ 2001

Like *Donkey Kong Country* on the SNES, this featured pre-rendered CG characters rather than hand-drawn sprites. But while this worked for *DK*, the style didn't gel well with the *Goemon* theme and the game had an unfinished feel.

GANBARE GOEMON: UCHUKAIZOKU AKOGINGU

■ PSone
■ 1996

This was similar to the SNES *Goemon* games. Although it looked marginally better, a number of design flaws made the game extremely frustrating. Jumping across minute stepping stones over ponds was particularly annoying.

SOREYUKE EBISUMARU: KARAKURI MEIRO-KIETA GOEMON NO NAZO

■ SNES
■ 1996

This was to the *Goemon* series what *Luigi's Mansion* is to *Mario* – a puzzle-based spin-off that lacked ingenuity. Set across a number of *Pac-Man*-esque levels, the idea was simply to collect items on your way through the bland isometric mazes.

GANBARE GOEMON! KURUNARAKOI! AYASHIGEIKKA NO KUROIKAGE!!

■ PSone
■ 1998

After moderate success with the global release of *Mystical Ninja : Starring Goemon* on N64, Konami tried creating a completely 3D PSone *Goemon* game. Sadly, it was disappointing visually and was all but unplayable in Japanese.

BOUKEN JIDAI KATSUGEKI GOEMON



■ PS2
■ 2000

Despite suffering awful 'jaggies', PS2 *Goemon* was similar to *Mystical Ninja: Starring Goemon* on N64. Konami has toyed with the idea of releasing it in the West, though the last we heard was that Working Designs would be publishing it in the US.

MYSTICAL NINJA: STARRING GOEMON

■ N64
■ 1997

Despite suffering all the usual N64 flaws (low resolution textures and choppy frame rates, for instance), this was a decent 3D action/adventure title. Very similar to *Ganbare Goemon 4*, the main aim was to rid Japan of aliens once more.

GOEMON'S GREAT ADVENTURE

■ N64
■ 1999

Another *Goemon* game that actually got released in the West, this was great fun, despite very blurry visuals. With a simultaneous two-player mode, this took the series back to its 2D roots by using polygons to create side-scrolling levels.

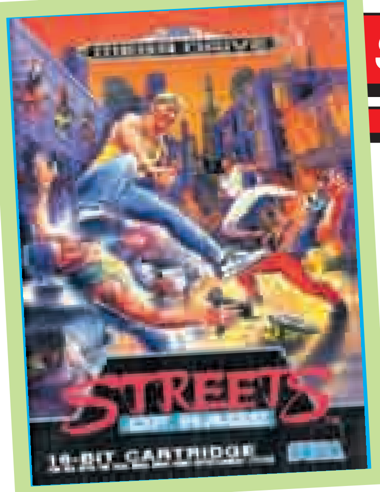


Why Don't They Remake?





S·T·R·E·E·T·S O·F R·A·G·E



Released: **1991**
Publisher: **SEGA**
Developer: **In-House**
Format: **Mega Drive**

From the moment Yuzo Koshiro's fantastic score started, you knew you'd just bought a title worthy of your hard-earned cash. SNES owners may have had the arcade hit *Final Fight* to crow about, but SEGA had ensured that *Streets Of Rage* (or *Bare Knuckle* as it was known in Japan) would be the game that gamers would remember as the king of the scrolling beat-'em-up (for home consoles at least).

Suffice to say, *Streets Of Rage*'s plot wasn't going to engage your brain – all you needed to know was that there was plenty of scum on the streets and somebody needed to give the dangerous districts a proverbial clean-up. You had a choice between Axel Stone, Adam Hunter and Blaze Fielding; three disillusioned ex-policeman who still enjoyed the impressive firepower of their old force (whose members looked suspiciously like the cops from SEGA's *E-Swat*).

Despite enjoying considerable success when it first appeared on the SNES, Capcom's *Final Fight* was not the arcade conversion everyone was hoping for. A lack of enemies on screen, occasional slowdown and, most importantly, the glaring omission of the arcade's second player was considered a critical stumbling block. *Streets Of Rage*, on the other hand, got everything right from the start; action was suitably fast and furious, later levels saw as many as six murderous thugs on screen at any one time and, crucially, a second player was now able to enter the hectic fray as well.

Each vigilante cop came with a decent range of attacks and was rated on three key abilities: Power, Jump and Speed. While the cumbersome Adam was sometimes ignored by players due to his slow speed, every character was actually extremely well-rounded – teaming up in multiplayer to deliver more powerful attacks was simply the icing on a rock-hard cake.

No matter how good *Streets Of Rage* may have been, it's Yuzo Koshiro's amazing musical score that gamers most fondly remember – Koshiro-san squeezed some amazing techno beats out of the Mega Drive's sound chip – the adrenaline-pumping showdowns with the various bosses were particularly memorable.

Although two sequels later appeared on the Mega Drive, SEGA's scrolling beat-'em-up series is now sadly silent. Very early code of a Dreamcast version was shown last year, but since then nothing. Here's hoping that SEGA decides to rethink its franchise strategy – after all, if they can produce an update to the lacklustre *Altered Beast* then anything is possible…



▶ Just because you're no longer a cop doesn't mean you can't use the force's rather excessive weaponry.

▶ The setting of *Streets Of Rage* was your typical seedy underbelly of a sprawling metropolis. Pimps, pushers, ho's and assorted 'scum' needed to be taught a lesson, and you were their musclebound, um, teacher.

DON'T GO CHANGING

GANBARE GOEMON

SO IT WAS A BIT WEIRD, BUT AT LEAST IT WAS FUNNY… UNLIKE THE ENGLISH VERSION.

In our opinion, Konami should release more of its *Goemon* games in Europe. Okay, so the plots are a bit strange – *Mystical Ninja: Starring Goemon* on N64 revolved around a group of aliens attacking ancient Japan in a flying peach, for example – and, at times, the weirdness actually verges on crudity, though no more so than Konami's other offerings such as *Sexy Parodius*.

Even so, when *Goemon* was released on the SNES a decade ago, the English translation was horribly Americanised, to the extent of being renamed *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*. Worst of all, Goemon and his friend, Ebisumaru were renamed Kid Ying and Dr. Yang, which we're sure you'll agree is utterly repugnant. Thankfully, things are a little more relaxed these days. *BMX XXX* anyone?



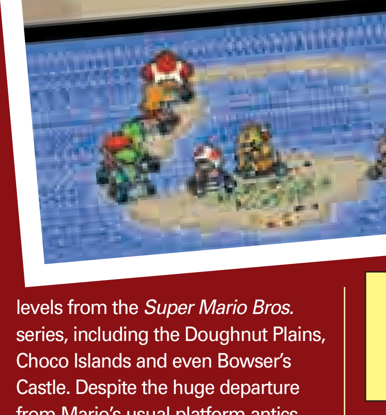
▶ "Have you heard the news? America's getting all uppity about nothing again…"



S·U·P·E·R M·A·R·I·O K·A·R·T

Greatest Retro Game Ever

MARIO KART 64 MAY HAVE BEEN ON A MORE POWERFUL SYSTEM THAN THE ORIGINAL, BUT WAS IT A BETTER GAME? WE DON'T THINK SO…



▶ You can take your *Gran Turismos* and your *Ridge Racers* – this is officially the best racing game ever. Ask Norris McWhirter.

Format(s): **Super Nintendo**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Price: **£39.99**
Release date: **1992**

What on earth was Nintendo thinking when it didn't include the Feather in *Mario Kart: Super Circuit* on the GBA and *Mario Kart 64*? You're probably thinking, what's the big deal? It was no great loss – there were plenty of other, more powerful, weapons on offer. However, the fact of the matter is that when *Mario Kart* lost the Feather, much of the strategy and balance that had made the SNES game so great was lost with it.

You see, aside from Invincibility Stars (and Turtle Shells in some circumstances), the Feather was the only power-up that allowed players to evade attacks at the last minute. Nothing was more satisfying than fooling your opponent into setting off their prized Red Turtle Shell, only to frivolously skip over it just before the moment of impact. On top of that, it could also be used to jump over walls and gaps, giving the player the opportunity to cut corners and gain access to secret roads.

Mario Kart was great in many other ways too. The sheer simplicity of design, the uncomplicated track layouts and the upbeat soundtrack all helped to make it a stand-out title – even among the myriad quality releases on Nintendo's 16-bit system. Using Mode 7 landscaping, Nintendo was able to create a selection of pseudo-3D environments based on levels from the *Super Mario Bros.* series, including the Doughnut Plains, Choco Islands and even Bowser's Castle. Despite the huge departure from Mario's usual platform antics, the vibrant atmosphere and colourful imagery managed to capture the spirit of the series perfectly.

Despite the many commendable elements though, one part of *Super Mario Kart* still stands out as being especially ingenious – the two-player versus game, Battle mode. Featuring four unique arenas filled with power-ups, Battle mode simply involved popping your opponent's three balloons without your own three being burst in the meantime. This was achieved by using seven power-ups in the form of Mushrooms, Bananas, Red and Green Turtle Shells, Ghosts, Stars and, of course, the trusty Feather (there were also Lightning Bolts, though they were only available in the normal race mode). Probably the most memorable of these were the Turtle Shells – Red ones acted as homing missiles and Greens could be bounced off walls and into your rival's path (if you were clever enough to work out the trajectory, that is). These power-ups, combined with surprisingly responsive car handling and rapid pacing, created one of the most enjoyable videogames of all time.

It's almost impossible to put across in words just how wonderful *Super Mario Kart* was. Totally original in concept and near flawlessly realised, other developers have released copycat titles, though none have managed to match the quality of this SNES classic.

LAST MONTH'S SNK SCREENSHOTS REVEALED

Now you can pretend to your mates that you knew all last month's screenshots. Just don't let them see this list…

FIRST ROW
Soccer Brawl
Riding Hero
Neo Driftout: New Technology
League Bowling
Double Dragon
Kizuna Encounter
Street Hoop
Savage Reign
Real Bout 2: The Newcomers
The King Of Fighters '98

SECOND ROW
Voltage Fighter
Samurai Shodown
Burning Fight
Art Of Fighting 3
King Of The Monsters
Thrash Rally
Viewpoint
Zintrick
The King Of Fighters '96
Neo Turf Masters

THIRD ROW
The King Of Fighters '99
World Heroes
Sengoku
Pulstar
Magician Lord
Windjammers
Fatal Fury
Galaxy Fight
Fatal Fury 2
King Of The Monsters 2

FOURTH ROW
NAM1975
Goal Goal Goal
Ninja Combat
Diggerman
Waku Waku 7
3 Count Bout
Kabuki Clash
Last Blade
Super Sidekicks
Magical Drop 3

FIFTH ROW
Ninja Masters
Crossed Swords
Football Frenzy
The King Of Fighters 2000
Last Blade 2
Fatal Fury Special
Top Hunter
Breakers
Art Of Fighting 2
The King Of Fighters '97

SIXTH ROW
Metal Slug 3
Metal Slug X
Metal Slug 2
Art Of Fighting
Real Bout Fatal Fury Special
Zed Blade
2020 Super Baseball
Blue's Journey
Aggressors Of Dark Kombat
The King Of Fighters 2002

SEVENTH ROW
Samurai Shodown 4
Robo Army
Samurai Shodown 3
Bust-A-Move
The King Of Fighters 2001
Aero Fighters 2
Ghost Pilots
Fatal Fury 2
Twinklestar Sprites
Garou: Mark Of The Wolves

EIGHTH ROW
The King Of Fighters '95
Real Bout fatal Fury
Metal Slug
Metal Slug 4
Baseball Stars 2
Samurai Shodown 2
Andro Dunos
Last Resort
Top Players Golf
Blazing Star

TREASURE HUNTER

SO YOU'RE A HARD-CORE GAMER, EH? WELL, HAVE YOU GOT ANY OF THESE PRICEY LITTLE TITLES IN YOUR VIDEOGAME COLLECTION?



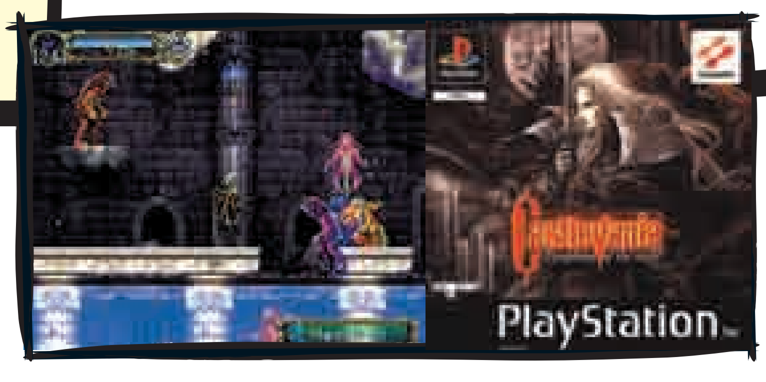


Remember how Biff got hold of the sports almanac in *Back To The Future 2*, then went back in time and used it to make his fortune? Well, sometimes we wish we could go back in time and buy as many sought-after retro games as possible for next to nothing. You see, while most of the games we spent our hard-earned cash on are now worth about 10p, a few titles have become highly collectable and generate enormous amounts of interest (and money) whenever they appear on eBay or in second-hand shops. Of course, the tricky part is spotting potentially money-generating titles when they initially appear, then buying them before they vanish.

Although any title released is a potential money-spinner, you can be fairly sure that anything half decent that gets released in a limited quantity will at least hold its value. Just look at the recent release of *Steel Battalion* on Xbox – boxed copies were appearing at inflated prices on eBay from day one, especially as the product was discontinued after just one batch was manufactured.

Another time when collectable titles often appear is towards the end of a console's lifespan, when products are being produced in smaller numbers. Take the Dreamcast, for instance – titles such as *Street Fighter 3: Third Strike*, *Street Fighter Alpha 3*, *Shenmue 2* and *Rez* were only ever released in limited quantities, and although none are worth a fortune right now, the signs are certainly good for the future. And lastly, there are titles that were only ever released abroad. A few great games, such as Treasure's *Radiant Silvergun* on the Saturn, for example, only ever made it out in Japan and subsequently became highly sought after by shoot-'em-up fans. It will be interesting to see if the Dreamcast version of *Ikaruga* (the follow-up to *Radiant Silvergun*) will be as popular with collectors in the future.

So if you're out and about and you spot an obscure retro game in your local charity shop, just remember, you could be looking at a nice little earner. With a bit of spit and polish, an item costing £1.50 could potentially be worth £150…



TITLE: CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
FORMAT: PSONE
DEVELOPER: KONAMI
RELEASED: 1997
VERSION: UK
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £60

Konami's *Castlevania* series has been running for more than 15 years now, and despite almost every instalment finding a healthy audience, only *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* has achieved cult status. Released on the PSone in 1997, the game remained true to its 2D roots and, as such, really only attracted a hard-core following.

Aware that the product was never going to appeal to the mass market, Konami released just a handful of copies, each packaged with a miniature art book and music CD. Even so, *Symphony Of The Night* didn't sell out right away, and for a while it was retailing at just £14.99. Now, however, you're lucky to find it for less than £60 (if it's complete with art book and music CD, that is).

TITLE: METAL SLUG
FORMAT: NEO-GEO
DEVELOPER: SNK
RELEASED: 1996
VERSION: ANY
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £1,500

In 1996 when *Metal Slug* was released, SNK was still trying to market its Neo-Geo CD machine around the world. Things weren't going so well due to the high costs of launching the system and the company was keeping a close eye on expenditures, which predictably affected distribution of its costly Neo-Geo AES home cartridges.

Seeing as how *Metal Slug* was a new title and it wasn't clear how well it would perform, only a limited number were ever manufactured for the AES system before production was halted. Of course, the series went on to be hugely popular and now the first game is amongst the most expensive retro titles out there at £1,500.



TITLE: RADIANT SILVERGUN
FORMAT: SATURN
DEVELOPER: TREASURE
RELEASED: 1998
VERSION: JAP
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £150

Treasure is one Japanese developer that knows how to create collectable videogames. The company (which initially consisted mainly of ex-Konami employees) first shot into the limelight in 1993 when it released the classic Mega Drive arcade/action game *Gunstar Heroes*, before going on to develop a string of cult favourites.

Normally aimed at hard-core gamers, Treasure's titles are usually created for systems with a limited user base, and released in such small quantities that they immediately become highly sought-after. *Radiant Silvergun*, a great-looking 2.5D up-screen shoot-'em-up, is possibly the best example – now selling for around £150.

TITLE: CHRONO TRIGGER
FORMAT: SNES
DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT
RELEASED: 1995
VERSION: US
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £80

Like so many of Squaresoft's Super Nintendo games, *Chrono Trigger* was released in Japan and America but never made it to Europe, giving UK RPG fans no choice but to import it from the States (or from Japan if they wanted to make things particularly difficult for themselves). Being such a specialist product, a limited number of copies were released in the US and fewer still made it to these shores, resulting in the game maintaining a high price. These days, most copies that are still in perfect condition have already been snatched up by collectors, though they do become available from time to time – if you're willing to pay around £80, of course.

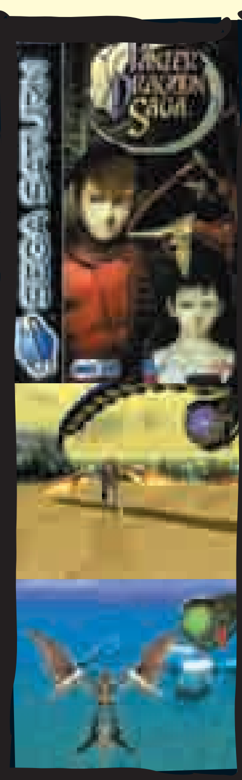




TITLE: PANZER DRAGOON SAGA
FORMAT: SATURN
DEVELOPER: SEGA TEAM ANDROMEDA
RELEASED: 1998
VERSION: UK
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £110

Being one of the last SEGA Saturn games to be released in the UK, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was pretty much ignored by all but the most ardent SEGA fans (of which there weren't that many at the time). Coming on four discs, the title expanded on its predecessors by introducing turn-based battles, cities that could be explored on foot, and RPG-style level-ups, all linked together by a complex storyline.

Because of its unique design, the game received mostly positive reviews, but most of the few gamers who did get hold of it seemed underwhelmed. Within a month of going on sale, *PDS* could be bought second-hand for around £25 from most videogame stores; just a short while later it disappeared completely, only to re-emerge at almost three times its recommended retail price.





TITLE: SAMBA DE AMIGO (WITH MARACAS)
FORMAT: DREAMCAST
DEVELOPER: SEGA SONIC TEAM
RELEASED: 2000
VERSION: UK
ESTIMATED CURRENT VALUE: £180

With rhythm/action games becoming increasingly popular towards the end of 2000, SEGA jumped on the bandwagon and released one of the most novel to date – *Samba De Amigo*. Comprising two bright red maracas and a plastic floor bar with built-in infra-red motion sensors, the technology included in the pack was certainly advanced for a home release, resulting in the game going on sale at £85.

Of course, it's no big secret that SEGA was in a financial hole at the time (as it continues to be, despite releasing quality titles all over the place) so it's amazing that the project was ever given the go ahead at all. Surprisingly, it was even granted an official release in Europe, and now sells second-hand for around £180.





S·P·E·C·I·A·L·I·S·T R·E·T·A·I·L·E·R·S

What's it called? RAVEN GAMES
Where can I find it? South of London in a little place called Beckenham.
Web Address: www.ravengames.co.uk
What can I buy there? This Aladdin's cave of goodies stocks rare Japanese gaming trinkets, as well as a range of retro games and systems, including a selection of arcade titles.



What's it called? VIDEO GAME CENTRE
Where can I find it? Bournemouth
Web Address: www.videogamecentre.co.uk
What can I buy there? The store stocks an enormous selection of games. It has the most comprehensive collection of SNES, Mega Drive and Saturn titles we've seen for ages.



What's it called? CeX (COMPUTER EXCHANGE)
Where can I find it? There are 11 CeX shops around the country
Web Address: www.cex.co.uk
What can I buy there? CeX stocks an impressive selection of UK and imported games and consoles, including specialist items like arcade PCBs and Neo Geo MVS carts.



C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E·S B·U·Y·E·R·S G·U·I·D·E

I'D BUY THAT FOR A DOLLAR

This is a basic list of the sort of prices you can expect to pay for the more popular retro gaming systems. Obviously, these can vary wildly but these prices are intended to be a rough guideline so you can tell if you're getting a bargain or being unscrupulously fleeced.

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50



Buy & sell your retro games with games™

ITEMS FOR SALE

Lot 01
Tazmania for SEGA Mega Drive, boxed with manual, good condition **£5 including unregistered p+p** Poole

Lot 09
King Of Fighters 2001 (English) for Neo-Geo AES, includes box and manual, mint condition **£100 plus p+p** Exeter

Lot 10
Metal Slug 3 (English) for Neo-Geo AES, includes box and manual, mint condition **£100 plus p+p** Exeter

Lot 11
Jet Pac **for Spectrum**, boxed with instructions, good condition **£1 plus p+p, or buyer collects** North Yorks

Lot 12
Lord Of The Rings **for Spectrum**, boxed with instructions, good condition **£2.50 plus p+p, or buyer collects** North Yorks

Lot 13
Amstrad GX4000 Console, two control pads, *Burnin' Rubber* game, PSU & RF lead; boxed with instructions and all documents, near mint condition **£40 including p+p** Oxon

Lot 14
Ecco The Dolphin (UK version) for SEGA Mega Drive, boxed with instructions, good condition **£4 plus p+p, or buyer collects** North Yorks

Lot 15
Micro Machines 2 – Turbo Tournament (UK version) for SEGA Mega Drive, boxed with instructions, good condition **£4 plus p+p, or buyer collects** North Yorks

Lot 16
Gunstar Heroes (UK version) for SEGA Mega Drive, boxed and instructions, good condition **£10 plus postage and packaging, or buyer collects** North Yorks

WANTED

Wanted 01 – Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night (PAL) for PSone. Must include box and manual **Bournemouth**

Wanted 02 – King Of Fighters Dream Match 1999 (Jap) for Dreamcast. Must include box and manual **Bournemouth**

Wanted 03 – StarLancer (PAL) for SEGA Dreamcast. Must include box and manual **Bournemouth**

Wanted 04 – Last Blade 2 FE (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Must include box and manual **Bournemouth**

Wanted 05 – Garou: Mark Of The Wolves for Neo-Geo AES. Must include box and manual **Poole**

Wanted 06 – Capcom CPSII arcade PCBs. Any considered **Poole**

Wanted 07 – King Of Fighters '98 (English) for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order and complete with box and manual **Exeter**

Wanted 08 – King Of Fighters 2000 (English) for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order and complete with box and manual **Exeter**

Wanted 09 – Last Resort for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order complete with box and manual **Exeter**

Wanted 10 – Miracle Piano teaching cartridge for NES (UK version). Must be in good working order **Suffolk**

SELLING
To sell items on gBay, simply list the following details in an email to: gbay@paragon.co.uk
- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The item(s) you wish to sell (a maximum of five per month please)
- The condition of the item(s) you wish to sell
- How much you want for the item(s)

Each item will then be allocated a lot number and listed on gBay, along with your region in the UK.

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- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The reference number for the item you're interested in

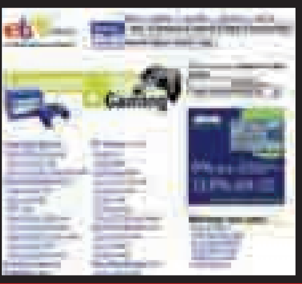
WANTED
If you're simply trying to get hold of a long-desired item, contact us in the same way as above stating what you want and any preferences on its condition or price.

After contacting us, your email address will be passed onto the relevant seller or buyer, who will contact you directly to complete the deal, arrange payment and make plans for postage, collection or delivery. Please note that this runs purely on a first come, first served basis.

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This is a service for private sellers, not dealers. gBay is for sales of retro games only – no post-Dreamcast consoles or games allowed. There's little point in advertising Mega Drive *FIFA* games as everybody already has at least two copies. Paragon Publishing Ltd cannot take any responsibility for items lost or broken in the post

EBAY: THE UK'S ONLINE MARKETPLACE





Where can I find it? Online
Web Address: www.ebay.co.uk
What can I buy there? Pretty much anything. Theoretically, you should eventually be able to find just about every game-related item ever made, providing you don't mind waiting for it, of course.

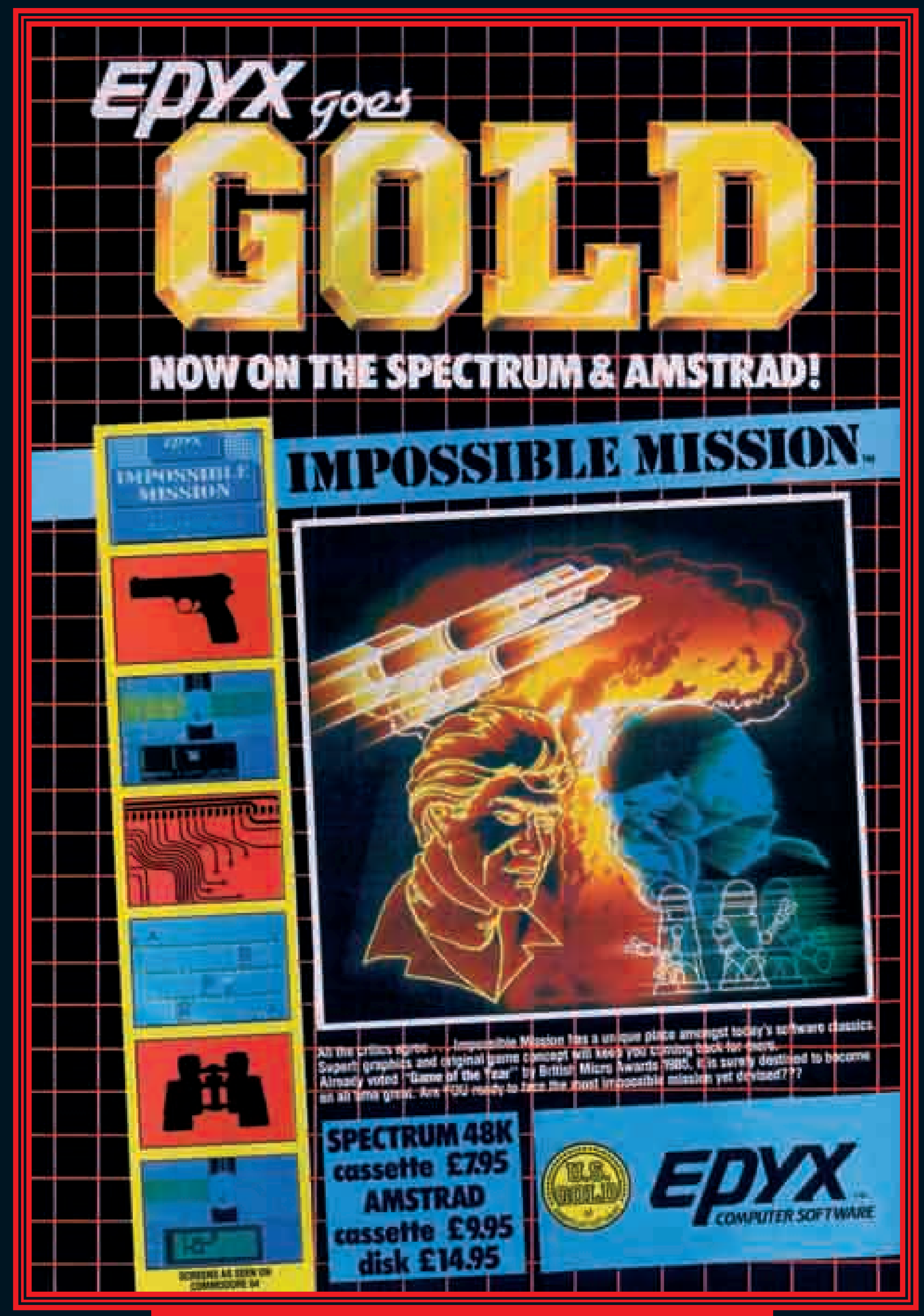
In case you've never heard of it (which is unlikely), eBay was founded in 1995 and is now the world's largest online trading community. The site works like a regular auction room – items are listed for ten days and bids can be placed at any point during that period. But first you'll need to register…

JOINING EBAY
The eBay registration process is designed to be as user-friendly as possible. All you need to do is click on the option at the top of the screen and enter your name, address and email address. You'll then have to create a user identity and password, and may also be asked to input your bank details to verify that all your information is true (this usually depends on which email service you're using). You will then be sent a confirmation email within 24 hours.

SEARCHING FOR AN ITEM
There are two simple methods of searching for items on ebay. The first is looking for groups of items (SNES games, for example) – simply click on the 'Computer & Video Gaming' link on the homepage then select your desired format from the list. Or you can type the specific title of the game or product you're looking for in the 'what are you looking for?' box and eBay will list any current items that match your search.

MAKING A BID
If you find something you'd like to buy, you can make a bid by selecting the 'bid' option on the left-hand side of the screen. You'll be asked for your user ID and password, before specifying how much you wish to bid. You can either place a bid just above the current asking price, or simply state the maximum you'd like to pay and eBay will automatically bid on your behalf until you either win the item or the price goes higher than your maximum bid.

WINNING AN AUCTION
If you win the auction, you'll need to contact the seller to arrange payment, as well as collection or delivery. The item's description will usually specify how much postage will cost, as well as which methods of payment the seller accepts. It's up to you to make sure that you reach an agreement that suits both parties.



IMPOSSIBLE MISSION (C64, Spectrum 48k, Amstrad CPC) Epyx, 1984 (C64)/1988 (Spectrum/Amstrad)


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

PLAYSTATION2

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Sony

UK LAUNCH DATE
24 November 2000

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£169.99

The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.



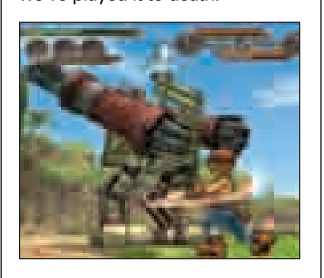


TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
3	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
4	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 2	Konami	In-House
6	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion
7	Dark Cloud 2 IMPORT	Sony	In-House
8	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House
9	Rez	SEGA	UGA
10	Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House
11	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG
12	Kingdom Hearts	SCEE	Squaresoft
13	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	In-House
14	Wild Arms 3	Ubi Soft	Media Vision
15	Ape Escape 2	Sony	In-House
16	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
17	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo
18	Capcom VS SNK 2	Capcom	In-House
19	Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution	SEGA	AM2
20	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	In-House

VIEWPOINT
DARK CHRONICLE

The name change might be a tad unnecessary (seeing as it could confuse fans of the original *Dark Cloud*) but there's no mistaking that Sony has got a winner on its hands in the form of *Dark Chronicle*. And we should know – we've played it to death.



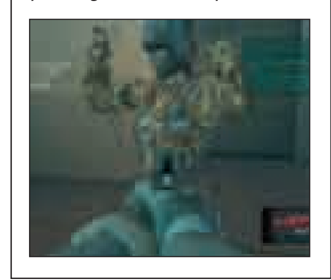
VIEWPOINT
DANCING STAGE MEGAMIX

Never let it be said that exercise isn't fun, and if the amount of sweat we've produced while playing this game is anything to go by, we'll be off the Weight Watchers diet and back down the chippy before you can blink.



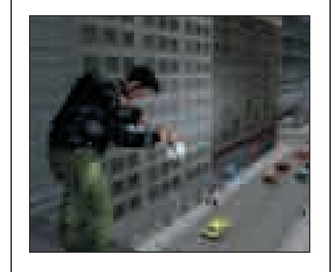
VIEWPOINT
METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

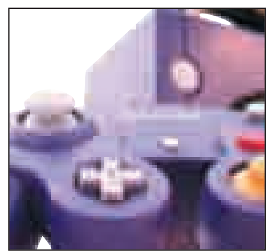
With the third instalment on the way and a GameCube version of the original in the works, now is the perfect time to experience Snake (and Raiden's) first PS2 adventure – just to find out what you've got in store very soon.



VIEWPOINT
GRAND THEFT AUTO 3

GTA: Vice City might have been the toast of the town in the charts since it came out, but we're still inclined to say that *GTA3* felt more polished and complete over its Miami-based follow-up. Add the fact that it's now also extra cheap and hey – it's a must-have.






GAMECUBE

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
3 May 2002

MEDIA
3-inch Optical Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. Admittedly, third-party support is rapidly dwindling, but you only have to look at the first-party releases to appreciate the quality gaming on offer – Nintendo still makes some of the finest games you'll ever play and missing out on them isn't an option .



TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title		Publisher	Developer
1	Metroid Prime		Nintendo	In-House
2	The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker		Nintendo	In-House
3	Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution	IMPORT	Konami	In-House
4	Super Monkey Ball 2		SEGA	Amusement Vision
5	TimeSplitters 2		Eidos	Free Radical
6	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact		Acclaim	In-House
7	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4		Activision	Neversoft
8	Ikaruga		Treasure	In-House
9	Super Mario Sunshine		Nintendo	In-House
10	Animal Crossing	IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
11	Eternal Darkness		Nintendo	Silicon Knights
12	Soul Calibur II	IMPORT	Namco	In-House
13	Resident Evil		Capcom	In-House
14	Resident Evil Zero		Capcom	In-House
15	Mario Party 4		Nintendo	Hudson
16	Mr Driller: Drill Land	IMPORT	Namco	In-House
17	Skies Of Arcadia Legends	IMPORT	SEGA	Overworks
18	Star Wars: Rogue Leader		Activision	Factor 5
19	Sonic Mega Collection		SEGA	Sonic Team
20	Aggressive Inline		Acclaim	Z-Axis

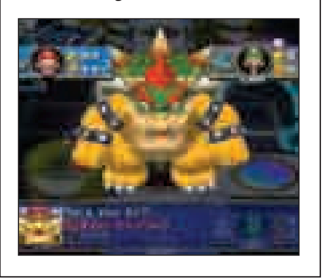
VIEWPOINT
ACE GOLF
Can't wait for Nintendo to get around to releasing *Mario Golf* on the GameCube? Then you'll want to be getting your hands on Eidos' *Ace Golf* – mainly for the fact that it's essentially the same as *Mario Golf 64*, but without the Mario characters. Brilliant.



VIEWPOINT
IKARUGA
Gorgeous to look at, but as tough as some very hard nuts – that's Treasure's *Ikaruga* for you. Now that it's finally out in the UK, you should be picking it up as soon as possible – if only to prove to yourself that you're not as good as you thought you were.



VIEWPOINT
MARIO PARTY 4
Got friends, a GameCube and four controllers? Then you can't go wrong with *Mario Party 4*. It's simple, fun and the most enjoyable way to make your mates hate you, short of punching them in the face or running away with their significant other.



VIEWPOINT
SSX TRICKY
You might whine about EA producing cookie-cutter sequels, but at least they know how to make a good over-the-top sports game. With *SSX3* on the horizon, you can now pick up this nifty snowboarder for a small amount of cash – and it's well worth it too.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

XBOX

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Microsoft

UK LAUNCH DATE
13 March 2002

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.



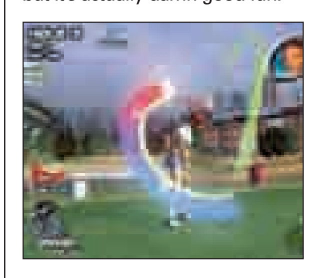
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie
2	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit
3	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit
4	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
5	Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	In-House
6	Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
7	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
8	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
9	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios
10	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis
11	Ghost Recon	Ubi Soft	Red Storm
12	Dead Or Alive 3	Microsoft	Tecmo
13	Soul Calibur II IMPORT	Namco	In-House
14	Moto GP	THQ	Climax
15	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
16	Quantum Redshift	Microsoft	Curly Monsters
17	Colin McRae Rally 3	CodeMasters	In-House
18	Tiger Woods 2003	EA	In-House
19	Buffy The Vampire Slayer	EA	In-House
20	Unreal Championship	Infogrames	Epic Games

VIEWPOINT
SOUL CALIBUR II
Having spent plenty of time kicking the living daylights out of each other on Namco's latest instalment of the *Soul Blade* series, we've come to the conclusion that's it's actually quite good. No, really it is. If you don't believe us, come and have a go…



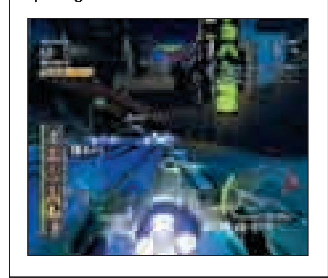
VIEWPOINT
OUTLAW GOLF
For those of you who like a spot of club-swinging action but don't fancy getting it on with Mr Woods, there's always *Outlaw Golf*. Mixing the best way to spoil a good walk with strippers, schoolgirls and a dominatrix might sound bizarre, but it's actually damn good fun.



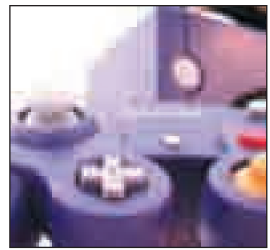
VIEWPOINT
GHOST RECON
Mmm, Live. Being one of the better games available to play on the Xbox Live service at the moment, *Ghost Recon* is well worth a look for the budding online gamer. Shooting your mates in the head with a rifle has never been so much fun…



VIEWPOINT
QUANTUM REDSHIFT
Alas, poor Curly Monsters – we knew it well. The developer has shuffled off this mortal coil (thus losing the chance to finish the in-development sequel), so we turn to the original *Quantum Redshift* for comfort instead. And it's quite good too.










GBA

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
22 June 2001

MEDIA
Flash Cartridge

CURRENT PRICE
£69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely new SP model is available now.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Advance Wars	Nintendo	In-House
2	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
3	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
4	Golden Sun: The Lost Age IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot
5	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	In-House
6	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubi Soft	Crawfish
7	Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
8	Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
9	Sonic Advance 2	SEGA	Sonic Team
10	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish

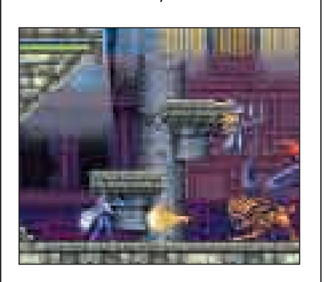
VIEWPOINT
GOLDEN SUN

Better get that first adventure completed quick – if you don't, you won't be able to transfer your precious save data into the just-as-brilliant sequel…



VIEWPOINT
CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW

Damn you, Konami – you've cost us even more precious hours from our short lives. When will the torment ever end, eh?



PC

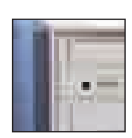
DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
N/A

UK LAUNCH DATE
N/A

MEDIA
4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it is perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
2	Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	Digital Extremes
3	Championship Manager 4	Eidos	Sports Interactive
4	Operation: Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
5	Freelancer	Microsoft	Digital Anvil
6	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
7	The Sims	EA	Maxis
8	Age Of Mythology	Microsoft	Ensemble Studios
9	Fallout 2	Virgin Interactive	Interplay
10	Sam And Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts

VIEWPOINT
HALF-LIFE

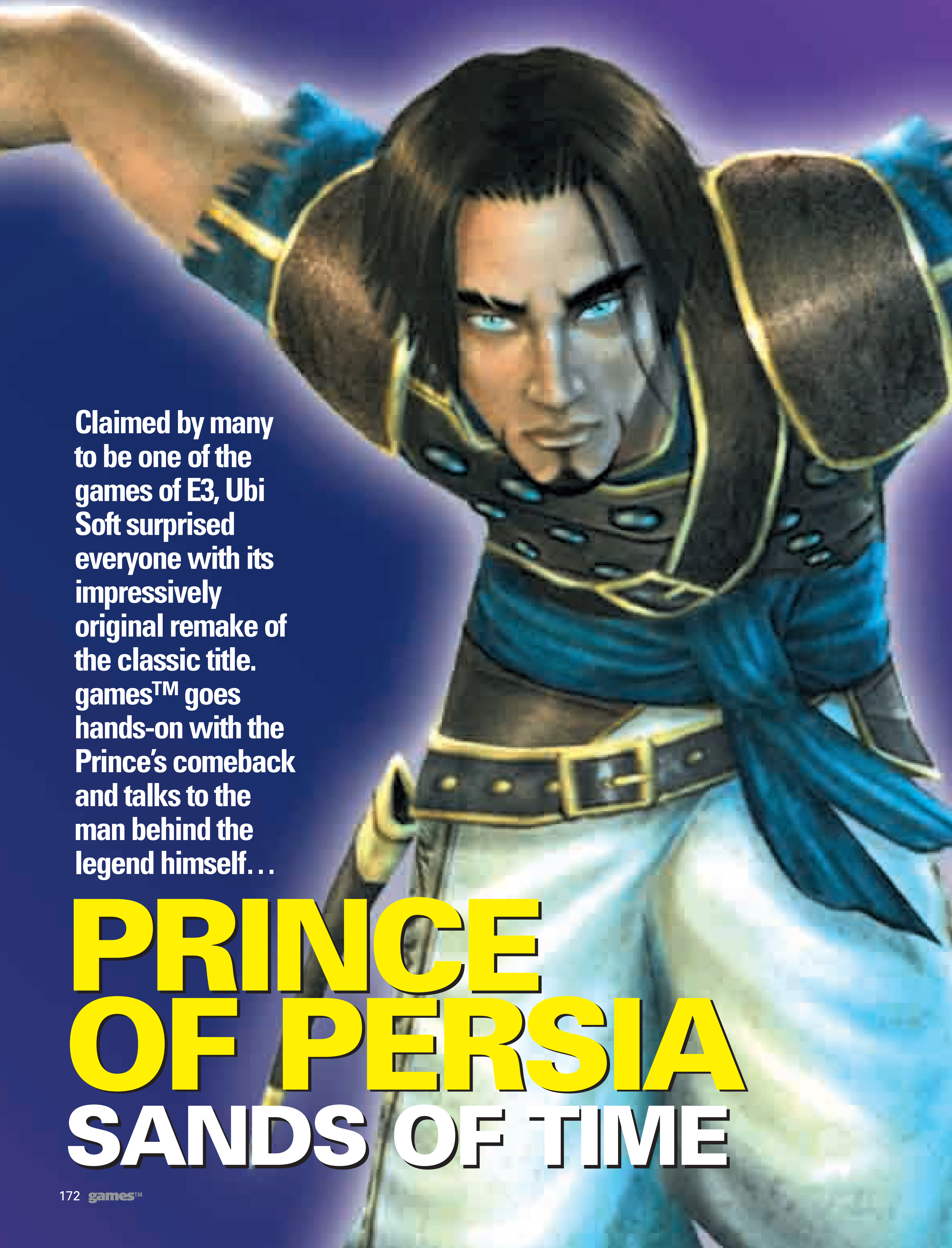
What do you mean, you don't like *Half-Life*? Go sit in the corner and think about what you've said – until you change your attitude, young lad, you're not going anywhere.



VIEWPOINT
FULL THROTTLE

Continuing our love for all things SCUMM, this biker-packed point n' click adventure proves that when it comes to absorbing and funny games, LucasArts knows its stuff.





Claimed by many to be one of the games of E3, Ubi Soft surprised everyone with its impressively original remake of the classic title. games™ goes hands-on with the Prince's comeback and talks to the man behind the legend himself…

PRINCE OF PERSIA
SANDS OF TIME



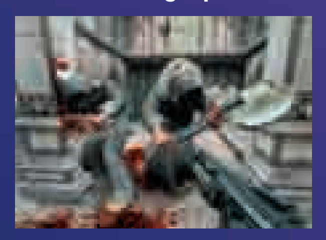
180 PAGES OF SULTAN-SLAYING EXCITEMENT

NEXT MONTH IN gamesTM

In the summertime when the weather is hot, things normally tend to slow down in the world of videogames. Of course, that doesn't mean we won't have plenty of things on offer for you next month…

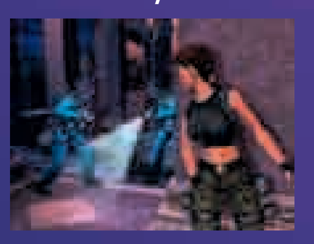
MORE… PREVIEWS

Having teased us with their wares at May's E3, more and more developers are getting ready to show us what they're releasing in the coming months. Want to know what to look out for? You're in the right place…



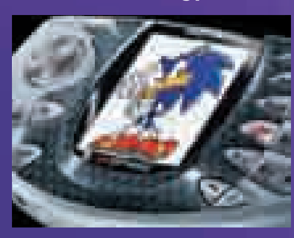
MORE… REVIEWS

Summer drought or not, there's still more than enough games on tap to keep you occupied next month. Of course, whether they'll actually turn out to be any good is another matter entirely.



MORE… FEATURES

Despite not always being the most powerful handheld, Nintendo's Game Boy has seen off more competition than we care to mention. But could that change with the influx of new technology?



And that's only a taste of what's in store for the summer issue of gamesTM. While you're all out throwing prawns on the barbeque, we'll be here slaving away over a hot computer just so you'll have something to read afterwards. Happy now?

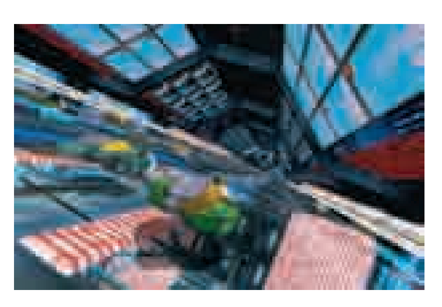
ON SALE 17 JULY 03

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

THE LEGIONS OF WORRYING GAMERS CONTINUE TO FRET ABOUT NINTENDO AND THE STATE OF THE MODELS IT USES FOR ITS ADVERTS. YOU COULDN'T MAKE IT UP…

It's official, Nintendo is only in it for the money and games journalists spoil it for everyone by being unnecessarily harsh on games – that never happens, does it?



MAKING CONTACT

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with gamesTM. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

gamesTM
Paragon Publishing Ltd
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address:
gamestm@paragon.co.uk

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who have bought this issue of **gamesTM** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **gamesTM** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the Net browser window:
www.totalgames.net/forum/
This will give you read-only access to the forum. To get in on the fun, you'll have to register – you can do that by clicking on the 'Register' icon at the top of the page. Fill in your details, choose a name and then wait for a password to be emailed to you (which will arrive in no time).

Step Three:
Once registered, click on the **gamesTM** forum icon. You'll need the password, and that's '**jetlag**'. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

FINALLY, AKITOSHI KAWAZU has spilt some of the beans regarding the gameplay of the upcoming *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*. Now call me an idealist if you must, but I'm sure that I'm not alone when I say that I would have preferred an RPG in the traditional mould, not the action/adventure game this is obviously going to be. Do you think that Nintendo owners are ever going to see a good number of RPGs on the current console, or will they all go to the almighty PS2?

On a related note, with the news that you will need multiple GBA link-ups to experience the game in multiplayer it is obvious where Nintendo's input has been on the project. Do you think that Nintendo is placing far too much emphasis on the GBA link-up, especially with the costs of multiple units, as will be needed with *FF:CC*? Is it being seen as a way to make extra cash from the poor unsuspecting public? Will Nintendo start to lose even more support if people get wise to its blatant cash-in ways?

Now, I love Nintendo as much as the next man, but someone needs to tell it that it will make more money through consistent and cool advertising than through games that require extra peripherals to be played properly.
Mark Heery

gamesTM: From what we saw at E3, GameCube games from third-party developers are a little thin on the ground at the moment and this includes RPGs, unfortunately. Interestingly, the main focus of Nintendo's E3 was the connectivity of the GBA and the GameCube but we feel it's little to do with milking cash out of unsuspecting gamers. It's more likely a reaction to the gaming experiences other formats are offering – GBA link-up is one thing that the Cube offers gamers that is genuinely different to rival consoles. Besides, no one's forcing you to play the game with friends, are they?

I THOUGHT NINTENDO would be less stubborn with Yamauchi gone, but it is refusing to drop the GameCube's RRP, and now Xbox has dropped in price. Does Nintendo really think that the average gamer will go for GameCube when Xbox has a DVD and a decent broadband service?

How long will the *Zelda* and *Metroid* bundles last? Unless they're here to stay (unlike the *Mario* packs) the price of the GameCube needs to be cut. It's been clear from day one that Nintendo's main focus has been to make profit. If Nintendo doesn't cut the price of the Cube it won't make a profit or increase its user-base.
Matt James.

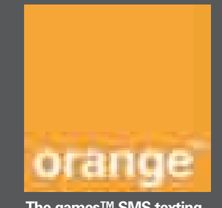
gamesTM: Glad you got that off your chest… As with many of the letters we get, you appear to be more concerned about Nintendo than is appropriate. Exactly what is wrong with Nintendo refusing to get embroiled in a price war? Sure, Microsoft's aggressive stance on pricing is going to make gamers think before they buy, but Nintendo is pretty confident that its console will sell on the strength of its recent releases (both *Metroid* and *Zelda* have helped push the hardware) so it's unlikely that we'll see a price drop anytime soon. Though we can appreciate the sentiment, could the same criticism not be levelled at Sony? Likewise, what's wrong with Nintendo trying to make a

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Will *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* be enough to save the GameCube from an early demise?

profit out of manufacturing software and hardware? Are Microsoft and Sony in the business of making hardware just for a lark? We think not.

☐ **AFTER FINISHING *THE*** *Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker* last night I can announce that it is most definitely the best GameCube game to date. Although it lacks the innovation of *Ocarina Of Time* I feel that it is still a very good game that deserves gamers' attention. Included on the bonus disc were movies of a few up-and-coming Nintendo games and I must share my disappointment with fellow **games™** readers about *Wario World* and *F-Zero GC*.

Wario World seems to play nothing like the classic Game Boy titles and looks dire by comparison. As for *F-Zero GC*, it looked terrible – grainy, jumpy and not very nice at all. I wondered what your opinions on these games were, and perhaps other readers could write in and share their disappointment (or excitement) about these two titles.

Sammy Barker

games™: Having played *F-Zero* we can confirm that both the arcade and console incarnations are fantastic. It's just a shame we'll have to wait a few months to get hold of them. *Wario World*, on the other hand, is slightly less inspiring. Wait for the review next issue.

☐ **I AM CONCERNED** that mass-market gamers are going to be greatly disappointed with their consoles. With each of the three contenders planning new consoles in 2004/2005, the GameCube and the Xbox will have had barely three years of sales. The majority of their owners will have only had one or two years of use out of their console before they see it being superseded. Combine this with the fact that that the games that are worth buying are spread across three formats and the machines' lifespans looks somewhat stunted.

This may not seem like much of a problem for gamers who can afford more than one gaming platform but I think that the vast majority of gamers (the 'casual' gamers who bring most of the money to the industry) may find their current console choice very disappointing and decide that the next wave of consoles are not worth their time. For this reason I will be very surprised if all three contenders manage to survive the next console war.

Brian Ashford

games™: It's certainly likely that Microsoft and Nintendo will attempt to align the launches of their next-gen hardware with that of the PlayStation3. But they might find it difficult – after all, Nintendo isn't known for getting consoles out on time. And look how long the PSone lasted – it beat off the challenge of the

"DO YOU THINK NINTENDO IS PLACING TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON THE GBA LINK-UP? WILL PEOPLE GET WISE TO ITS BLATANT CASH-IN WAYS?"

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

TEXT LIFE…

☐ Call me a perv, but have u thought of doing sexiest gamegirl, page 3 etc? Couldn't harm your sales
We leave that sort of thing to single-format mags, thanks very much.

☐ Why do u say halo's multi is poor?imo it is betta than timesplitters2 cos it is more controlled w-out bots and more tense.i think timesplitters2is overrated
Some people would agree with you. However, the multiplayer game in *TimeSplitters 2* has such a wealth of options that it's hard to argue that it isn't class. Bit frenetic, mind.

☐ I have an excuse not to use your Game voucher – I wouldn't want to butcher page 18 of your beautifully crafted magazine with a pair of scissors
Yeah, sorry about that. It's just that people complained that we didn't have a voucher. You just can't win…

☐ How much are the Mario games worth if they are in mint condition on the nes
Not as much as you might like. A boxed NES will go for a mere £10 on eBay, with games selling for as little as £1.

☐ Hi do u know if there are any rare games on the playstation 1 and how many are available worldwide
Fashions change and values of PSone games change almost every month. Top recommendations include: *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*, *Kurushi* and *Vandal Hearts*. Unless you mean games made by the developer Rare, of course, in which case the answer is a big fat no.

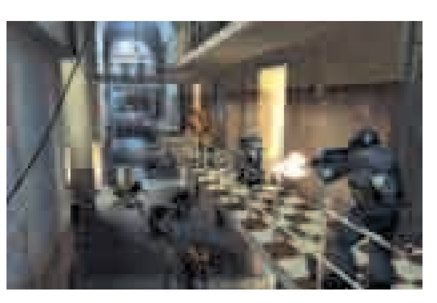
☐ How about classic characters? Chun Li? The woman should be applauded, if only for fitting her monstrous thighs into those oh-so accomadating tights.. ahem.
We do cover the occasional classic character in the Retro section of the magazine, but in future we might decide not to because you scare us.

☐ Wheres the back issues section, I missed issue 3!
Details of who to contact are in this issue on the subscription pages.

☐ Can u please shed some light on these supposed final fantasy 7 & 8 remakes for the ps2…?
Rumours and myth, I'm afraid.

☐ …Sorry that's for the GameCube
It's still not happening.





Dreamcast and refused to die even in the face of its more powerful brother, the PS2. So it's unlikely that the current generation of consoles will simply become extinct. The tastes of so-called 'mass-market' gamers are too difficult to gauge to suggest that they'll simply get bored of the games on offer. As such, it's nigh-on impossible to predict what these gamers respond to. Take *Enter The Matrix*, a game that we rated a pretty lowly 4/10 and yet it sold ridiculously well – we might not have liked the game but plenty of shoppers did. We can only try to offer guidance based on our opinion and experience. Assuming that people feel they're getting some kind of pleasure from such games we're sure that gamers, whether they're 'hard-core' or 'mass-market', will snap up the next generation of hardware and games.

☐ **JUST BEEN ENJOYING** issue 6 but noticed something a bit out of place on page 14 – I assume that the picture of the people looking at the GameCube contains models rather than normal people (after all, what fella would wear a violet T-shirt unless he was being paid?). My question is, why is the bloke on the left wearing a plastic nose? Is this some monthly competition where you say 'hidden in this month's issue is a false body part, find it and win a prize of your choice'. If so, I'll have a Neo Geo with the complete *Metal Slug* series.

If I am mistaken, and this chap had his nose bitten off by a dog or he lost it in a horrendous Vicks/acid mix-up, then I must apologise to him. Post Heather Mills, I am sure that the modelling industry is now more open to those who are, in some respects, 'differently abled'. Who knows, maybe one day we'll even see Stephen Hawking advertising *Dance Dance Revolution*.

There could, however, be a more sinister explanation. Perhaps this bloke has a particularly nasty Karl Malden / Alex Ferguson-esque proboscis and someone deemed it offensive and PhotoShopped it. They could at least have used the right skin colour.

However, most likely he was actually turning his nose up at the 'Cube along with seemingly all the other less well-informed members of the public, so they cut and pasted a nose from a PS2 owner over it instead.

Matthew Taylor

gamesTM: If only we had been running a competition… Mental note for next issue: Lara Croft's wooden leg, Sam Fisher's glass eye and Mario's plastic hip. Find them all and win, er, the editor's prosthetic hand.

☐ **SOMETHING THAT HAS** been bothering me recently is that it seems that all of the joy and soul is being sucked out of gaming by

"IT SEEMS THAT ALL OF THE JOY AND SOUL IS BEING SUCKED OUT OF GAMING BY COMPLACENCY, PRETENTIOUSNESS AND SNOBBERY"



We reckon that this is just a trick of the light, but could it be something more sinister? Or could it?

complacency, pretentiousness and snobbery. The majority of the gaming press are ireful cynics who berate and scorn games for silly reasons. Back in the good old days, when a polygon was but the fevered dream of a madman, you saw your games console as a magical portal into a land of flashing, bleeping fantasy that could provide hours of wide-eyed, drooling enjoyment. Now most people treat it like an unwanted child, all too willing to snub it until it does something that pleases them.

But think about it – in your hands is the ultimate escapist tool that, unlike film, lets you be there. Gaming is one of technology's greatest gifts, and you should be thankful that you aren't a crusty old *Daily Mail* reader who thinks that games are responsible for the downfall of society. After all, there are worse things than a bad game; namely the SARS epidemic, terrorism and *Ready Steady Cook*.

As society comes crashing down around you, your console will always be there for you, churning out wondrous, pixelated bundles of pure enjoyment without a care in the world. As **games™** issue 2 proudly proclaimed, gaming is 'better than life'.

Andy Kelly

games™: There probably isn't a games journalist around that hasn't been guilty of being a bit harsh on a game. However, games journalists are paid to offer insight and opinions and believe us, there are many, many games that fail so miserably to deliver the goods that being subjected to them can get pretty depressing at times. What you say though is right, the very best games offer a special kind of escapism and as a games mag we do try to champion them – just don't expect us to be soft on games that are utterly dismal. They'll get buried in peat for a month instead.

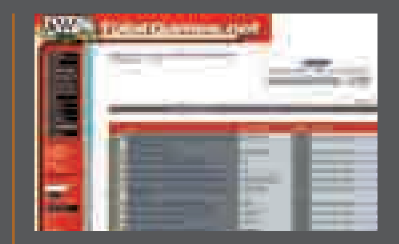
INITIALLY, I THOUGHT E3 was a huge letdown, that's until I sat down and thought about it. In fact, it was amazing and some of the new games that were shown really blew me away (*Halo 2*, *Half Life 2*). And then I thought about the surprises that were at the show. Well, we did have the announcement of the PSP, which was a shock even if there was little else of interest mentioned at Sony's Conference.

Some would also argue that Nintendo had a poor E3 (by its own high standards) but think of the games that were shown and I'm not so sure. There was a new *Mario Kart*, an exclusive *Metal Gear Solid*, and that's before you consider key third-party titles such as *Viewtiful Joe*, *Killer 7* and *Biohazard 4*.

I think that Nintendo's mistake was that it showed too few surprise games at its stand. Try to imagine that you are in the Nintendo conference and suddenly Kojima-san appears onstage – that in itself would've have been something of a shock to some people, and then imagine as he announces *MGS: The Twin Snakes*. Now you can see what was missing from Nintendo's booth: the element of surprise.

Alexander Anderson

games™: We get your point but there were also seemingly hundreds of games at the show that are now appearing only on the PC, Xbox and PS2. Certainly there are some top GC games on the way but publishers also seem to be deserting the GameCube, which can't really be a good thing.



FROM THE FORUM

Minimalism in gaming. Is it true that less is more?

Brian Bloodaxe
posted 01 May 2003 01:11 PM

When trying to describe *Ico* to a friend I told him to imagine it as a minimalist *Zelda*. This didn't help him any so I went on to explain that by only having three characters in the game your attention is fully focused on their plight. By setting the entire game in one location more subtle changes in scenery are possible and the larger changes have much greater impact (remember the first time you saw the windmill? Or when you awoke after falling from the bridge?). And in the gameplay everything extraneous is removed. No health or inventory. No stats or power-ups. The only thing that ever changes about your avatar is the weapon he carries, and that provides just enough tactics and just enough interaction to keep the game fresh for at least two plays. Perhaps 'minimalist' was the wrong term, I think that *Ico* is really a distillation of everything that makes the *Zelda* archetype great.

But the conversation got me wondering if there are any other games out there that follow this paradigm of removing everything extraneous to allow greater detail and immersion into the heart of the game. I have come up with three others:

Ikaruga: An impressive simplification on one of the simplest and oldest genres.

Project Zero (Fatal Frame): A cut-down survival horror. I haven't had a chance to play it yet so please give me your opinions.

The Void levels in *Super Mario Sunshine*: Many (myself included) feel that these are the best bits in *SMS* and the first ever 3D platformer that adheres to classic 2D platforming ideals.

So please, are there other games out there built on this same principle? Are there rubbish games out there built on this same principle? Is *Super Monkey Ball* a minimalist 3D platformer? Tell me what you think.

wideheadofknowledge
posted 01 May 2003 05:20 PM

This made me think of *Gran Turismo*. Surely this is the antithesis of minimalist gaming? Personally, I love the replays and the graphics (literally jaw-dropping the first time on PSone) but the game itself, in GT mode, I found to be tiresome beyond belief. I like to just, well, race in the racing games I play. For me, the time trials in *Waverace 64* were so compulsive. Can't bear the tinkering below the bonnet crap.

The Edge
posted 01 May 2003 09:56 PM

Almost all puzzle games, *Streets Of Rage*, *SMB* (NES) and 2D *Sonic*.

Brian Bloodaxe
posted 02 May 2003 07:05 AM

I'm not sure if anything before the PSX can really be considered. Before that games had to be simplistic in play and have a fairly low-key design just to be able to fit on the cart and run on the console.

Super Mario Bros NES definitely wasn't minimalist. Quite the opposite, in fact – it was great because of the complexities it added. Things like the power-up system, the momentum when you tried to turn or stop and the ability to run at two different speeds. If you want a distillation of the 2D platformer look at *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* – you could play that with three buttons!

Sonic I'm not sure about, mostly because I can't think of any other game in the incredibly-fast-paced-2D-Platformer genre, so I have nothing to compare it with.

And again, puzzles and scrolling beat-'em-ups are by their nature simplistic genres, so unless they have a really impressive design aesthetic I can't see them being classed as minimalist.

I do agree with you that *Gran Turismo* is the exact opposite of a minimalist game.


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